TRACK'S END

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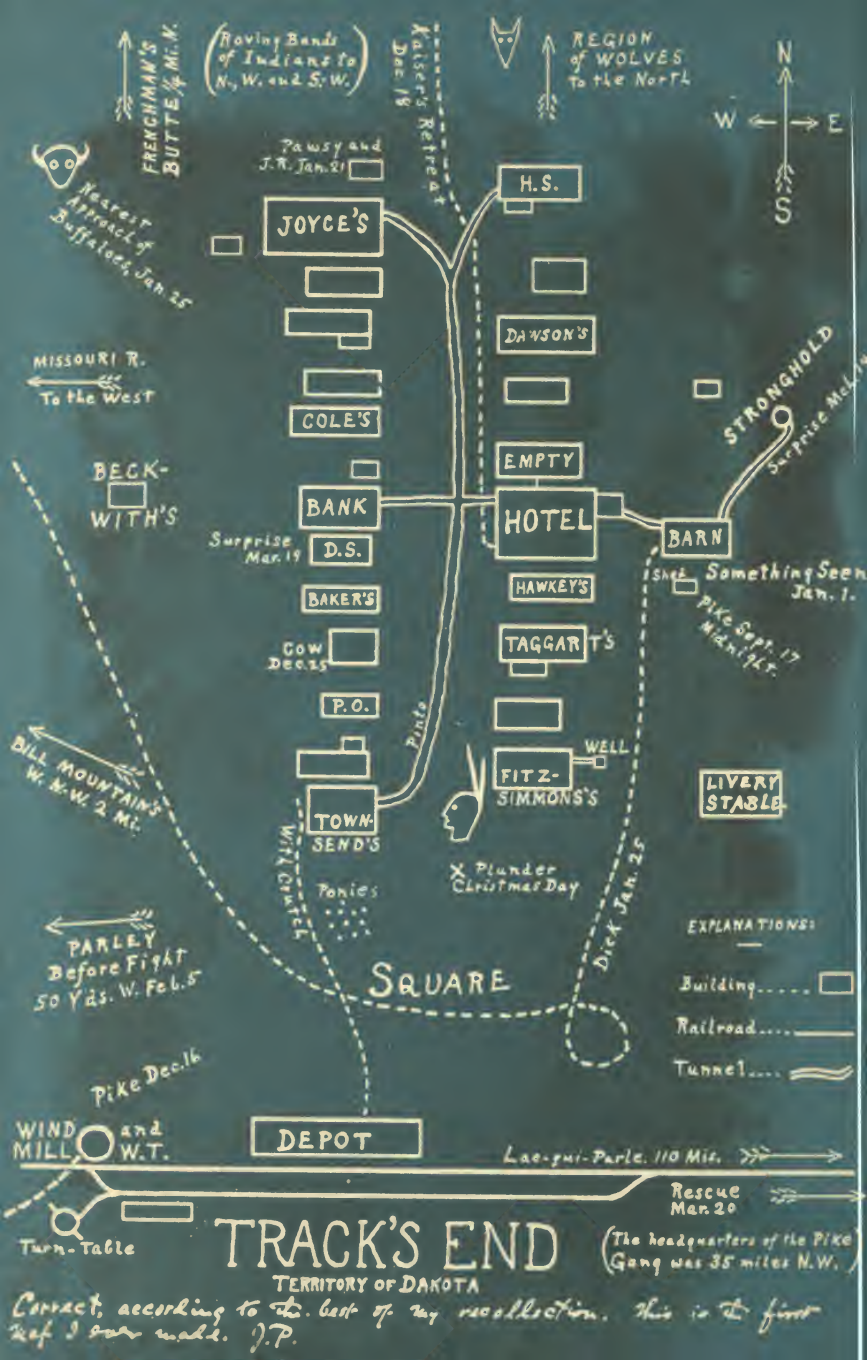
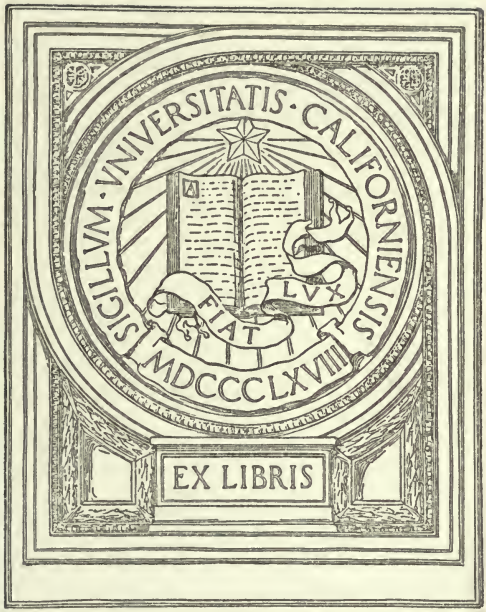
HAYDEN CARRUTH



FRENCHMAN'S BUTTE ¼ Mi. N.
(Roving Bands of Indians to N., W. and S.-W.)
Kaiser's Retreat Dec 18
REGION of WOLVES to the North
N
W
E
S
Nearest Approach of Buffaloes, Jan. 25
Pawsy and J.R. Jan. 21
H.S.
JOYCE'S
DAWSON'S
MISSOURI R.
To the West
COLE'S
STRONGHOLD
Surprise Mch. 19
EMPTY
BECK-WITH'S
BANK
HOTEL
BARN
Surprise Mar. 19
D.S.
Shed
Something Seen Jan. 1.
HAWKEY'S
BAKER'S
Pike Sept. 17 Midnight.
COW Dec. 25
TAGGART'S
P.O.
Pinto
WELL
BILL MOUNTAIN'S W. N.-W. 2 Mi.
FITZ-SIMMONS'S
LIVERY STABLE
TOWN-SEND'S
With Crutch
Ponies
Plunder Christmas Day
Dick Jan. 25
EXPLANATIONS:
PARLEY Before Fight 50 Yds. W. Feb. 5
SQUARE
Building
Railroad
Tunnel
Pike Dec. 16
WIND MILL and W.T.
DEPOT
Lac-qui-Parle. 110 Mis.
Rescue Mar. 20
Turn-Table
TRACK'S END
TERRITORY OF DAKOTA
(The headquarters of the Pike Gang was 35 miles N.W.)
Correct, according to the best of my recollection. This is the first map I ever made. J.P.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KAISER AND I FIGHTING THE TIMBER-WOLVES

TRACK'S END

BEING THE NARRATIVE OF JUDSON PITCHER'S
STRANGE WINTER SPENT THERE
AS TOLD BY HIMSELF
AND EDITED

BY

HAYDEN CARRUTH

INCLUDING AN ACCURATE ACCOUNT
OF HIS NUMEROUS ADVENTURES, AND
THE FACTS CONCERNING HIS SEVERAL
SURPRISING ESCAPES FROM DEATH
NOW FIRST PRINTED IN FULL

ILLUSTRATED BY
CLIFFORD CARLETON
WITH A CORRECT MAP OF TRACK'S
END DRAWN BY THE AUTHOR

HARPER & BROTHERS
NEW YORK AND LONDON
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Books by
HAYDEN CARRUTH

THE ADVENTURES OF JONES. Illustrated. 16mo
THE RATTLETRAP. Illustrated. Post 8vo
TRACK'S END. Illustrated. Post 8vo

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TO

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NOTICE

SHOULD any reader of this History of my life at Track's End wish to write to me, to point out an error (if unhappily there shall prove to be errors), or to ask for further facts, or for any other reason, he or she may do so by addressing the letter in the care of my publishers, Messrs. Harper & Brothers, who have kindly agreed promptly to forward all such communications to me wheresoever I may chance to be at the time.

I should add that my hardships during that Winter at Track's End did not cure me of my roving bent, though you might think the contrary should have been the case. Later, on several occasions, I adventured into wild parts, and had experiences no whit less remarkable than those at Track's End, notably when with the late Capt. Nathan Archway, master of the *Belle of Prairie du Chien* packet, we descended into Frontenac Cave, and, there in the darkness (aided somewhat by Gil Dauphin), disputed possession of that subterranean region with no less a character than the notorious Isaac Liverpool, to the squeaking of a million bats. And I wish hereby to give notice that no one is to put into Print such accounts of that occurrence as I may have been heard to relate from time to time around camp-fires, on shipboard, and so forth, since I mean, with the kind help of Mr. Carruth, to publish forth the facts concerning it in another Book; and that before long.

JUDSON PITCHER.

LITTLE DRUM, FLAMINGO KEY, *July*, 1911.

TRACK'S END

TRACK'S END

CHAPTER I

Something about my Home and Track's End: with how I leave the one and get acquainted with Pike at the other.

WHEN I left home to shift for myself I was eighteen years old, and, I suppose, no weakling; though it seems to me now that I was a mere boy. I liked school well enough, but rather preferred horses; and a pen seems to me a small thing for a grown man, which I am now, to be fooling around with, but I mean to tell (with a little help) of some experiences I had the first winter after I struck out for myself.

I was brought up in Ohio, where my father was a country blacksmith and had a small farm. His name was William Pitcher, but, being well liked by all and a square man,

everybody called him Old Bill Pitcher. I was named Judson, which had been my mother's name before she was married, so I was called Jud Pitcher; and when I was ten years old I knew every horse for a dozen miles around, and most of the dogs.

It was September 16th, in the late eighteen-seventies, that I first clapped eyes on Track's End, in the Territory of Dakota. The name of the place has since been changed. I remember the date well, for on that day the great Sisseton prairie fire burned up the town of Lone Tree. I saw the smoke as our train lay at Siding No. 13 while the conductor and the other railroad men nailed down snake's-heads on the track. One had come up through the floor of the caboose and smashed the stove and half killed a passenger. Poor man, he had a game leg as long as I knew him, which was only natural, since when the rail burst through the floor it struck him fair.

I was traveling free, as the friend of one of the brakemen whom I had got to know in St. Paul. He was a queer fellow, named Burrdock. The railroad company set great store by Burrdock on account of his dealings with

some Sioux Indians. They had tried to ride on top of the cars of his train without paying fare, and he had thrown them all off, one by one, while the train was going. The fireman told me about it.

Burrdock was taking me out to Track's End because he said it was a live town, and a good place for a boy to grow up in. He had first wanted me to join him in braking on the railroad, but I judged the work too hard for me. If I had known what I was coming to at Track's End I'd have stuck to the road.

Perhaps I ought to say that I left home in June, not because I wasn't welcome to stay, but because I thought it was time I saw something of the world. Mother was sure I should be killed on the cars, but at last she gave her consent. I went to Galena, from there up the Mississippi on a packet to St. Paul, and then out to Dakota with Burrdock.

The snake's-heads delayed us so that it was eleven o'clock at night before we reached Track's End. Ours was the only train that ran on the road then, and it came up Mondays and Thursdays, and went back Tuesdays and Fridays. It was a freight-train, with a

caboose on the end for passengers, "and the snake's-heads," as the fireman said. A snake's-head on the old railroads was where a rail got loose from the fish-plate at one end and came up *over* the wheel instead of staying down *under* it.

Track's End was a new town just built at the end of the railroad. The next town back toward the east was Lone Tree; but that day it burned up and was no more. It was about fifty miles from Track's End to Lone Tree, with three sidings between, and a water-tank at No. 14. After the fire the people all went to Lac-qui-Parle, sixty miles farther back; so that at the time of which I write there was nothing between Track's End and Lac-qui-Parle except sidings and the ashes of Lone Tree; but these soon blew away. There were no people living in the country at this time, and the reason the road had been built was to hold a grant of land made to the company by the government, which was a foolish thing for the government to do, since a road would have been built when needed, anyhow; but my experience has been that the government is always putting its foot in it.

When I dropped off the train at Track's End I saw by the moonlight that the railroad property consisted of a small coal-shed, a turn-table, a roundhouse with two locomotive stalls, a water-tank and windmill, and a rather long and narrow passenger and freight depot. The town lay a little apart, and I could not make out its size. There were a hundred or more men waiting for the train, and one of them took the two mail-sacks in a wheelbarrow and went away toward the lights of the houses. There were a lot of mules and wagons and scrapers and other tools of a gang of railroad graders near the station; also some tents in which the men lived; these men were waiting for the train with the others, and talked so loud and made such a disturbance that it drowned out all other noises.

The train was left right on the track, and the engine put in the roundhouse, after which Burrdock took me over town to the hotel. It was called the Headquarters House, and the proprietor's name was Sours. After I got a cold supper he showed me to my room. The second story was divided into about twenty rooms, the partitions being lathed but

not yet plastered. It made walls very easy to talk through, and, where the cracks happened to match, as they seemed to mostly, they weren't hard to look through. I thought it was a good deal like sleeping in a squirrel-cage.

The railroad men that I had seen at the station had been working on an extension of the grade to the west, on which the rails were to be laid the next spring. They had pushed on ten miles, but, as the government had stopped making a fuss, the company had decided to do no more that season, and the train I came up on brought the paymaster with the money to pay the graders for their summer's work; so they all got drunk. There were some men from Billings in town, too. They were on their way east with a band of four hundred Montana ponies, which they had rounded up for the night just south of town. Two of them stayed to hold the drove, and the rest came into town, also to get drunk. They had good luck in doing this, and fought with the graders. I heard two or three shots soon after I went to bed, and thought of my mother.

Some time late in the night I was awakened by a great rumpus in the hotel, and made out from what I heard through the laths that some men were looking for somebody. They were going from room to room, and soon came into mine, tearing down the sheet which was hung up for a door. They crowded in and came straight to the bed, and the leader, a big man with a crooked nose, seized me by the ear as if he were taking hold of a boot-strap. I sat up, and another poked a lantern in my face.

"That's him," said one of them.

"No, he was older," said another.

"He looks like he *would* steal a dog, anyhow," said the man with the lantern. "Bring him along, Pike."

"No," said the man who had hold of my ear, "he ain't much more'n a boy—we're looking for grown men to-night."

Then they went out, and I could feel my ear drawing back into place as if it were made of rubber. But it never got quite back, and has always been a game ear to this day, with a kind of a lop to it.

Sours told me in the morning that they

were looking for the man that stole their dog, though he said he didn't think they had ever had a dog. Pike, he said, had come out as a grader, but it had been a long time since he had done any work.

I took a look around town after breakfast and found forty or fifty houses, most of them stores or other places of business, on one street running north and south. There were a few, but not many, houses scattered about beyond the street. Some of the buildings had canvas roofs, and there were a good many tents and covered wagons in which people lived. The whole town had been built since the railroad came through two months before. There was a low hill called Frenchman's Butte a quarter of a mile north of town. I climbed it to get a view of the country, but could see only about a dozen settlers' houses, also just built.

The country was a vast level prairie except to the north, where there were a few small lakes, with a little timber around them, and some coteaux, or low hills, beyond. The grass was dried up and gray. I thought I could make out a low range of hills to the

west, where I supposed the Missouri River was. On my way back to town a man told me that a big colony of settlers were expected to arrive soon, and that Track's End had been built partly on the strength of the business these people would bring. I never saw the colony.

When I got back to the hotel Sours said to me:

"Young man, don't you want a job?"

I told him I should be glad of something to do.

"The man that has been taking care of my barn has just gone on the train," continued Sours. "He got homesick for the States, and lit out and never said boo till half an hour before train-time. If you want the job I'll give you twenty-five dollars a month and your board."

"I'll try it a month," I said; "but I'll probably be going back myself before winter."

"That's it," exclaimed Sours. "Everybody's going back before winter. I guess there won't be nothing left here next winter but jack-rabbits and snowbirds."

I had hoped for something better than

working in a stable, but my money was so near gone that I did not think it a good time to stand around and act particular. Besides, I liked horses so much that the job rather pleased me, after all.

Toward evening Sours came to me and said he wished I would spend the night in the barn and keep awake most of the time, as he was afraid it might be broken into by some of the graders. They were acting worse than ever. There was no town government, but a man named Allenham had some time before been elected city marshal at a mass-meeting. During the day he appointed some deputies to help him maintain order.

At about ten o'clock I shut up the barn, put out my lantern, and sat down in a little room in one corner which was used for an office. The town was noisy, but nobody came near the barn, which was back of the hotel and out of sight from the street. Some time after midnight I heard low voices outside and crept to a small open window. I could make out the forms of some men under a shed back of a store across a narrow alley. Soon I heard two shots in the street, and then a man came

running through the alley with another right after him. As the first passed, a man stepped out from under the shed. The man in pursuit stopped and said:

"Now, I want Jim, and there's no use of you fellows trying to protect him." It was Allenham's voice.

There was a report of a revolver so close that it made me wink. The man who had come from under the shed had fired point-blank at Allenham. By the flash I saw that the man was Pike.

CHAPTER II

The rest of my second Night at Track's End, and part of another: with some Things which happen between.

I WAS too frightened at first to move, and stood at the window staring into the darkness like a fool. I heard the men scramble over a fence and run off. Then I ran out to where Allenham lay. He made no answer when I spoke to him. I went on and met two of the deputies coming into the alley. I told them what I had seen.

"Wake up folks in the hotel," said one of the men; then they hurried along. I soon had everybody in the hotel down-stairs with my shouting. In a minute or two they brought in Allenham, and the doctor began to work over him. The whole town was soon on hand, and it was decided to descend on the graders' camp in force. Twenty or thirty men volunteered. One of the deputies named Dawson was selected as leader.

"Are you certain you can pick out the man who fired the shot?" said Dawson to me.

"Yes," I answered. "It was Pike."

"If you just came, how do you happen to know Pike?" he asked.

"He pulled me up last night by the ear and looked at me with a lantern," I said.

"Well," replied the man, "we'll take you down and you can look at him with a lantern."

They formed into a solid body, four abreast, with Dawson ahead holding me by the arm, as if he were afraid I would get away. To tell the truth, I should have been glad enough to have got out of the thing, but there seemed to be no chance of it. I was glad my mother could not know about me.

We soon came up to the camp, and the men lined out and held their guns ready for use. Not a sound was to be heard except the loud snoring of the men in the nearest tent, which seemed to me almost *too* loud. There was a dying camp-fire, and the stars were bright and twinkling in a deep-blue sky; but I didn't look at them much.

"Come, you fellows, get up!" called Dawson. This brought no answer.

"Come!" he called louder, "roust up there, every one of you. There's fifty of us, and we've got our boots on!"

A man put his head sleepily out of a tent and wanted to know what was the trouble. Dawson repeated his commands. One of our men tossed some wood on the fire, and it blazed up and threw the long shadows of the tents out across the prairie. One by one the men came out, as if they were just roused from sleep. There was a great amount of loud talk and profanity, but at last they were all out. Pike was one of the last. Dawson made them stand up in a row.

"Now, young man," said he to me, "pick out the man you saw fire the shot that killed Allenham."

At the word killed Pike started and shut his jaws tightly together in the middle of an oath. I looked along the line, but saw that I could not be mistaken. Then I took a step forward, pointed to Pike, and said:

"That's the man."

He shot a look at me of the most deadly hatred; then he laughed; but it didn't sound to me like a good, cheerful laugh.

"Come on," said Dawson to him. Then he ordered the others back into their tents, left half the men to guard them, and with the rest of our party went a little ways down the track to where an empty box-car was standing on the siding. "Get in there!" he said to Pike, and the man did it, and the door was locked. Three men were left to guard this queer jail, and the rest of us went back to the Headquarters House. Here we found that the doctor's report was that Allenham would probably pull through.

The next morning a mass-meeting was held in the square beside the railroad station. After some talk, most of it pretty vigorous, it was decided to order all of the graders to leave town without delay, except Pike, who was to be kept in the car until the outcome of Allenham's wound was known. It wasn't necessary even for me to guess twice to hit on what would be the fate of Pike if Allenham should die.

In two hours the graders left. They made a long line of covered wagons and filed away to the east beside the railroad track. They were pretty free with their threats, but that was all it amounted to.

For a week Track's End was very quiet. Allenham kept on getting better, and by that time was out of danger. There was a good deal of talk about what ought to be done with Pike. A few wanted to hang him, notwithstanding that Allenham was alive.

"When you get hold of a fellow like him," said one man, "you can't go far wrong if you hang him up high by the neck and then sort o' go off and forget him."

Others proposed to let him go and warn him to leave the country. It happened on the day the question was being argued that the wind was blowing from the southwest as hard a gale as I ever saw. It swept up great clouds of dust and blew down all of the tents and endangered many of the buildings. In the afternoon we heard a shout from the direction of the railroad. We all ran out and met the guards. They pointed down the track to the car containing Pike rolling off before the wind.

"How did it get away?" everybody asked.

"Well," said one of the guards, "we don't just exactly know. We reckon the brake got off somehow. Mebby a dog run agin the car with his nose and started it, or something like

that," and the man rolled up his eyes. There was a loud laugh at this, as everybody understood that the guards had loosened the brake and given the car a start, and they all saw that it was a good way to get rid of the man inside. Tom Carr, the station agent, said that, if the wind held, the car would not stop short of the grade beyond Siding No. 15.

"My experience with the country," said Sours, "is that the wind always holds and don't do much else. It wouldn't surprise me if it carried him clean through to Chicago."

I went back to the barn and sat down in the office. To tell the truth, I felt easier that Pike was gone. I well knew that he had no love for me. I sat a long time thinking over what had happened since I had come to Track's End. It seemed as if things had crowded one another so much that I had scarcely had time to think at all. I little guessed all the time for thinking that I was going to have before I got away from the place.

While I was sitting there on the bench an old gentleman came in and asked something about getting a team with which to drive into the country. There was a livery stable in

town kept by a man named Munger and a partner whose name I have forgotten; but their horses were all out. The Headquarters barn was mainly for the teams of people who put up at the hotel, but Sours had two horses which we sometimes let folks have. After the old gentleman had finished his business he asked me my name, and then said:

"Well, Judson, you did the right thing in pointing out that desperado the other night. I'm pleased to know you."

My reply was that I couldn't very well have done otherwise than I did after what I saw.

"But there's many that wouldn't have done it, just the same," answered the old gentleman. "Knowing the kind of a man he is, it was very brave of you. My name is Clerkinwell. I run the Bank of Track's End, opposite the Headquarters House. I hope to hear further good reports of you."

He was a very courtly old gentleman, and waved his hand with a flourish as he went out. You may be sure I was tickled at getting such words of praise from no less a man than a banker. I hurried and took the team around to the bank, and had a good look at it. It

was a small, square, two-story wooden building, like many of the others, with large glass windows in the front, through which I could see a counter, and behind it a big iron safe.

I had given up sleeping in the house, with its squirrel-cage rooms, preferring the soft prairie hay of the barn. But when bedtime came this night Mr. Clerkinwell had not returned, so I sat up to wait for the team. He had told me that he might be late. It was past midnight when he drove up to the barn.

"Good-evening, Judson," said he. "So you waited for me."

"Yes, sir," I answered.

"Do you know if Allenham or any one is on watch about town to-night?"

"I think not, sir," I said. "I haven't seen nor heard anybody for over an hour."

"Very careless, very careless," muttered the old gentleman. Then he went out, and in a moment I heard his footsteps as he went up the outside stairs to his rooms in the second story of his bank building. I put the horses in their stalls, and fed and watered them, and started up the ladder to the loft. What Mr. Clerkinwell had said was still running in my

mind. I stopped and thought a moment, and concluded that I was not sleepy, and decided to take a turn about town.

I left my lantern and went out to the one street. There was not a sound to be heard except the rush of the wind around the houses. The moon was almost down, and the buildings of the town and Frenchman's Butte made long shadows on the prairie. There was a dull spot of light on the sky to the southeast which I knew was the reflection of a prairie fire a long ways off; but there was a good, wide fire-brake a quarter of a mile out around the town, so there was no danger from that, even if it should come up.

I went along down toward the railroad, walking in the middle of the street so as not to make any noise. The big windmill on the water-tank swung a little in the wind and creaked; and the last light from the moon gleamed on its tail and then was gone. I turned out across where the graders had had their camp. Here the wind was hissing through the dry grass sharp enough. I stood gaping at the stars with the wind blowing squarely in my face, and wondering how I

ever came so far from home, when all at once I saw straight ahead of me a little blaze of fire.

My first thought was that it was the camp-fire of some mover on the fire-brake. It blazed up higher, and lapped to the right and left. It was the grass that was afire. Through the flames I caught a glimpse of a man. A gust of wind beat down the blaze, and I saw the man, bent over and moving along with a great torch of grass in his hand, leaving a trail of fire. Then I saw that he was inside the fire-brake.

In another moment I was running up the middle of the street yelling "Fire!" so that to this day it is a wonder to me that I did not burst both of my lungs.

CHAPTER III

A Fire and a Blizzard: with how a great many People go away from Track's End and how some others come.

IT was an even two hours' fight between the town of Track's End and the fire; and they came out about even—that is, most of the scattering dwelling-houses were burned, but the business part of the town was saved. There was no water to be had, nor time to plow a furrow, so we fought the fire mainly with brooms, shovels, old blankets, and such-like things with which we could pound it out. But it got up to the dwellings in spite of us. As soon as the danger seemed to be past, I said to Allenham, who had had charge of the fire brigade:

"I saw a man set that fire out there. Don't you suppose we could find him?"

"Pike, I'll bet a dollar!" exclaimed Allenham. "We'll try it, anyhow, whoever it is."

He ordered everybody that could to get a horse, and soon we all rode off into the darkness. But though we were divided into small parties and searched all that night and half the next day, nothing came of it. I kept with Allenham, and as we came in he said:

"There's no use looking for him any longer. If he didn't have a horse and ride away out of the country ahead of all of us, then he's down a badger-hole and intends to stay there till we quit looking. I'll wager he'll know better'n to show himself around Track's End again, anyhow."

Toward night the train came in pushing Pike's box-car ahead of it. Burrdock, who had now been promoted to conductor, said he had bumped against it about six miles down the track. The little end door had been broken open from the inside with a coupling-pin, which Pike must have found in the car and kept concealed. With the window open it was no trick at all to crawl out, set the brake, and stop the car. Nobody doubted any longer that he was the one who had started the fire.

I may as well pass over the next month without making much fuss about it here.

Nothing happened except that folks kept going away. After the fire nearly all of those burned out left, and about the same time all of the settlers who had taken up claims in the neighborhood also went back east for the winter, some of them on the train, but most of them in white-topped covered wagons. There was almost no business in town, and if you wanted to get into a store you would generally first have to hunt up the owner and ask him to open it for you. I saw Mr. Clerkinwell occasionally. He always spoke kindly and wished me success. Then the great October blizzard came.

Folks in that country still talk about the October blizzard, and well they may do so, because the like of it has never been known since. It came on the twenty-sixth day of October, and lasted three days. It was as bad as it ought to have been in January, and the people at Track's End, being new to the country, judged that the winter had come to stay, and were discouraged; and so most of the rest of them went away.

It began to snow on the morning of the twenty-fifth, with an east and northeast wind.

The snow came down all day in big flakes, and by evening it was a foot deep. It turned colder in the night, and the wind shifted to the northwest. In the morning it was blizzarding. The air was full of fine snow blown before the wind, and before noon you could not see across the street. Some of the smaller houses were almost drifted under. This kept up for three days. Of course the train could not get through, and the one telegraph wire went down and left the town like an island alone in the middle of the ocean.

The next day after the blizzard stopped it grew warmer and the snow began to melt a little, but it was another four days before the train came. By the time it did come it seemed as if everybody in town was disgusted or frightened enough to leave. When the second train after the blizzard had gone back, there were but thirty-two persons, all told, at Track's End. Only one of these was a woman, and she it was that was the cause of making me a hotel-keeper on a small scale.

The woman was Mrs. Sours, wife of my employer. One morning, after every one had

left the breakfast-table except her husband and myself, she said to me:

"Jud, couldn't you run the hotel this winter, now that there are only three or four boarders left, and them not important nor particular, only so they get enough to eat?"

"I don't know, ma'am," I said. "I can run the barn, but I'm afraid I don't know much about a hotel."

"Do you hear the boy say he can do it, Henry?" says she, turning to her husband. "Of course he can do it, and do it well, too. He always said his mother taught him how to cook. That means I'm a-going down on the train to-morrow, and not coming back to this wretched country till spring has melted off the snow and made it fit for a decent body to live in."

"Well, all right," said Sours. "You may go; Jud and me are good for it."

"Mercy sakes!" cried Mrs. Sours, "do you suppose I'm going to leave you here to be frozen to death, and starved to death, and killed by the wolves that we already hear howling every night, and murdered by Indians, and shot by Pike and that wretched

band of horse-thieves that the Billings sheriffs who stopped here the other night was looking for? No, Henry; when I go I am going to take you with me."

Sours tried to argue with her a little, but it did no sort of good, and the next day they both went off and I was left in charge of the hotel for the winter with three boarders—Tom Carr, the station agent and telegraph operator; Frank Valentine, the postmaster; and a Norwegian named Andrew, who was to take my place in the barn. Allenham had gone before the blizzard. Some others went on the same train with Mr. Sours and his wife. We were twenty-six, all told, that night.

The weather remained bad, and the train was often late or did not come at all. On the last day of November there were an even fourteen of us left. On the morning of that day week Tom Carr came over from the station and brought word that he had just got a telegram from headquarters saying that for the rest of the winter the train would run to Track's End but once a week, coming up Wednesday and going back Thursday.

"Well, that settles it with *me*," said Harvey

Tucker. "I shall go back with it the first Thursday it goes."

"Same with me," said a man named West. "I know when I've got enough, and I've got enough of Track's End."

Mr. Clerkinwell, who happened to be present, laughed cheerfully. He was by far the oldest man left, but he always seemed the least discouraged.

"Oh," he said to the others, "that's nothing. The train does us no good except to bring the mail, and it can bring it just as well once a week as twice. We were really pampered with that train coming to us twice a week," and he laughed again and went out.

It was just another week and a day that poor Mr. Clerkinwell was taken sick. He had begun boarding at the hotel, and that night did not come to supper. I went over to his rooms to see what the trouble was. I found him on the bed in a high fever. His talk was rambling and flighty. It was a good deal about his daugther Florence, whom he had told me of before. Then he wandered to other matters.

"It's locked, Judson, it's locked, and no-

body knows the combination; and there aren't any burglars here," he said. I knew he was talking about the safe in the room below.

We all did what we could for him, which was little enough. The doctor had gone away weeks before. He grew worse during the night. The train had come in that day, and I asked Burrdock if he did not think it would be best to send him away on it in the morning to his friends at St. Paul, where he could get proper care. Burrdock agreed to this plan. Toward morning the old gentleman fell asleep, and we covered him very carefully and carried him over to the train on his bed. He roused up a little in the car and seemed to realize where he was.

"Take care of the bank, Judson, take good care of it," he said in a sort of a feeble way. "You must be banker as well as hotel-keeper now."

I told him I would do the best I could, and he closed his eyes again.

It was cold and blizzardy when the train left at nine o'clock. Tucker and West were not the only ones of our little colony who took the train; there were five others, making, with

Mr. Clerkinwell, eight, and leaving us six, to wit: Tom Carr, the agent; Frank Valentine, the postmaster; Jim Stackhouse; Cy Baker; Andrew, the Norwegian, and myself, Judson Pitcher.

After the train had gone away down the track in a cloud of white smoke, we held a mock mass-meeting around the depot stove, and elected Tom Carr mayor, Jim Stackhouse treasurer, and Andrew street commissioner, with instructions to "clear the streets of snow without delay so that the city's system of horse-cars may be operated to the advantage of our large and growing population." The Norwegian grinned and said:

"Aye tank he be a pretty big yob to put all that snow away."

In a little while the new street commissioner and I left the others at a game of cards and started out to go to the hotel. There was a strong northwest wind, and the fine snow was sifting along close to the ground. I noticed that the rails were already covered in front of the depot. The telegraph wire hummed dismally. We were plowing along against the wind when we heard a shout and

READING THE OUTLAWS' LETTER, DECEMBER SIXTEENTH

looked up. Over by the old graders' camp there were three men on horseback, all bundled up in fur coats. One of them had a letter in his hand which he waved at us.

"Let's see what's up," I said to Andrew, and we started over. At that the man stuck the letter in the box of a broken dump-cart, and then they all rode away to the west.

When we came up to the cart I unfolded the letter and read:

To Prop. Bank of Track's End and other Citizens and Folks:

The Undersined being in need of a little Reddy Munny regrets that they have to ask you for $5,000. Leave it behind the bord nailed to the door of Bill Mountain's shack too mile northwest and there wunt be no trubble. If we don't get munny to buy fuel with we shall have to burn your town to keep warm. Maybe it will burn better now than it did last fall. So being peecibel ourselves, and knowing *how very peecibel* you all are, it will be more plesent all around if you come down with the cash. No objextions to small bills. We know *how few there are of you* but we don't think we have asked for too much.

Yours Respecfully, D. Pike,
and numrous Frends.

P.X. Thow somewhat short on reddy funs,
We still no how to use our guns.

This is poetry but we mean bizness.

CHAPTER IV

We prepare to fight the Robbers and I make a little Trip out to Bill Mountain's House: after I come back I show what a great Fool I can be.

THE next minute I was back in the depot reading this letter to the others. When I had finished they all looked pretty blank. At last Jim Stackhouse said:

"Well, I'd like to know what we're going to do about it?"

Tom Carr laughed. "If they come it will be the duty of the street commissioner to remove 'em for obstructing the car lines," he said.

I don't think Andrew understood this joke, though the rest of us laughed, partly, I guess, to keep up our courage.

"Well," went on Carr, "there's one thing sure—we can't send them five thousand dollars even if we wanted to; and we don't want to very much. I don't believe there is a

hundred dollars in the whole town outside of Clerkinwell's safe."

"What do you suppose there is in that?" asked Baker.

"There might be a good deal and there might not be so much," said Carr. "I heard that he saved $20,000 out of the failure of his business back east and brought it out here to start new with. He certainly didn't take any of it away with him, nor use much of it here. He might have sent it back some time ago, but it hasn't gone through the express office if he did."

"Nor it hasn't gone through the post-office," said Frank Valentine. "I guess it's in the safe yet, most of it."

"Very likely," answered Carr. "But even if it is I don't believe Pike and those fellows would know enough to get it out unless they had all day to work at it; and what would we be doing all that time?"

"Shooting," said Jim Stackhouse; but I thought he said it as if he would rather be doing anything else. I didn't know so much about men then as I do now, but I could see that Tom Carr was the only man in the lot that could be depended on in case of trouble.

"Well, how are we fixed for things to shoot with?" went on Carr.

"I've got a repeating rifle," answered Valentine. "So have you, and so has Cy. I guess Sours left some shooting-irons behind, too, didn't he, Jud?"

"Yes; a Winchester and a shot-gun," I replied.

"There are some other shot-guns in town, too," continued Valentine. "But I guess the best show for us is in Taggart's hardware store. When he went away he left the key with me, and there's a lot of stuff boxed up there."

"Go and see about it and let's pull ourselves together and find out what we're doing," said Carr. "I think we can stand off those fellows all right if we keep our eyes open. I suppose they are up at the headquarters of the old Middleton gang on Cattail Creek, the other side of the Missouri. The men that went through here with that pony herd last fall were some of them, and the ponies were all stolen, so that Billings sheriff said. I guess Pike has joined them, and I should think they would suit each other pretty well."

In a little while Valentine came back and said he had found a dozen repeating rifles, and that he thought there were more in some of the other boxes. There was also plenty of cartridges and some revolvers and shot-guns.

"That fixes us all right for arms," said Carr. "Before night we must organize and get ready to defend the town against an attack if it should come; but I think the next thing is to send a letter out to Mountain's house and put it where they will look for the money, warning them to keep away if they don't want to be shot."

"Yes," answered Valentine, "that will be best. Write 'em a letter and make it good and stiff."

Tom went into the back room and soon came out with a letter which read as follows:

TRACK'S END, *December* 16.

To D. PIKE and FELLOW-THIEVES,—You will never get one cent out of this town. If any of you come within range you will be shot on sight. We are well armed, and can carry out our share of this offer.

COMMITTEE OF SAFETY.

"I guess that will do," said Tom. "There isn't any poetry in it, but I reckon they'll

understand it. Now, Jud, what do you say to taking it out and leaving it on Mountain's door?"

"All right," I answered; "I'll do it."

"Probably Jim had better go along with you," said Carr. "I don't think any of them are there, but you can take my field-glass and have a look at the place when you get out to Johnson's."

We all went to dinner, and by the time Jim and I were ready to start the sky had clouded over and threatened snow. I said nothing, but slipped back into the hotel and filled my pockets with bread and cold meat. I thought it might come handy. It was so cold and the snow was so deep that we had decided to go on foot instead of horseback, but we found it slow work getting along. Where the crust held us we made good time, but most of the way we had to flounder along through soft drifts.

At Johnson's we took a long look at Mountain's with the glass, but could see no signs of life. It began to snow soon after leaving here, and several times we lost sight of the place we were trying to reach, but we kept on

and got there at last. The snow was coming down faster, and it seemed as if it were already growing dark.

"It isn't going to be very safe trying to find our way back to-night," said Jim. "Let's see what the prospect for staying here is."

We pushed open the door. It was a board shanty with only one room, and that half full of snow. But there was a sheet-iron hay stove in one end and a stack of hay outside. I told Jim of the food which I had brought.

"Then we'll stay right here," he said. "It's ten to one that we miss the town if we try to go back to-night. Our tracks are filled in before this."

We set to work with an old shovel and a piece of board and cleaned out the snow, and then we built a fire in the stove. We soon had the room fairly comfortable. The stove took twisted hay so fast that the work did more to keep us warm than the fire.

We divided the food for supper, leaving half of it for breakfast. It made a pretty light meal, but we didn't complain. I wondered what we should do if the storm kept up the next day, and I suppose Jim thought of the

same thing; but neither of us said anything about that. I sat up the first half of the night and fed the fire, while Jim slept on a big dry-goods box behind the stove, and he did as much for me during the last half.

It was still snowing in the morning. We divided the food again, leaving half of it for dinner, which left a breakfast lighter than the supper had been. We were a good deal discouraged. But soon after noon it stopped snowing and began to lighten up. It was still blowing and drifting, but we thought we might as well be lost as to starve; so we left the letter behind the board on the door and started out.

We got along better than we expected. The wind had shifted to the northwest, so it was at our backs. We passed Johnson's deserted house and finally came within sight of the town through the flying snow. We were not twenty rods from the station when suddenly Jim exclaimed:

"Why, there's a train!"

Sure enough, just beyond the station was an engine with a big snow-plow on it, with one freight-car and a passenger-car. A dozen

men with shovels stood beside it stamping their feet and swinging their arms to keep from freezing. There were faces at the car-windows, and Burrdock and Tom Carr were walking up and down the depot platform. We came up to them looking pretty well astonished, I guess.

"When I got to the Junction yesterday I got orders to take another train and come back here and get you folks," said Burrdock in answer to our looks. "Just got here after shoveling all night, and want to leave as soon as we can, before it gets to drifting any worse. This branch is to be abandoned for the winter and the station closed. Hurry up and get aboard!"

Jim and I were both too astonished to speak.

"Yes," said Tom Carr, "we were just starting after you when we saw you coming. We're going to take Sours's horses and the cow in the box-car. I just sent Andrew over after them —and the chickens, too, if he can catch them."

I don't know how it was, but my face flushed up as hot as if it had been on fire. I felt the tears coming into my eyes, I was in that state of passion.

"Tom," I said, "who was left in charge of Sours's things?"

"Why—why, you were," answered Tom, almost as much astonished as I had been a moment before.

"Who gave you authority to meddle with them?" I said.

"Nobody. But I knew you wouldn't want to leave them here to starve, and I did it to save time."

"They're not going to starve here," I said, getting better control of my voice. "Call Andrew back this minute. You've neither of you the right to touch a thing that's there."

"But surely you're going with the rest of us?" said Tom.

"No, I'm not," I answered.

Tom turned and started toward the town.

"Now, don't make a fool of yourself, young man," said Burrdock. "This here town is closed up for the winter. You won't see the train here again before next March."

"The train won't see me, then, before next March," I said. "Jim, are you going with the rest of them?"

"Well, I'm not the fellow to do much staying," he answered.

I turned and started for the hotel; Burrdock muttered something which I didn't catch. I saw Andrew going toward the train, but without any of the animals. Tom came down the street and met me. He held out his hand and said:

"Jud, I admire you. I'd stay with you if I could, but the company has ordered me to come, and I've got to go. But it's a crazy thing for you to do, and you'd better come along with us, after all."

"No," I said, "I'm going to stay." (It was a foolish pride and stubbornness that made me say it; I wanted to go already.)

"Well, good-by, Jud."

"Good-by, Tom," I said.

He walked away, then turned and said:

"Now, Jud, for the last time: Will you come?"

"No, I won't!"

In another minute the train rolled away, with Tom standing on the back platform with his hand on the bell-rope ready to pull it if I signaled him to stop.

But I didn't. I went on over to the Headquarters House. It was beginning to get dark; and the snow was falling again. The door was stuck fast, but I set my shoulder against it and pushed it open. The snow had blown in the crack and made a drift half-way across the floor. I put my hand on the stove. It was cold, and the fire was out.

CHAPTER V

Alone in Track's End I repent of my hasty Action: with what I do at the Headquarters House, and the whole Situation in a Nutshell.

WHEN I came to think of it afterward I thought it was odd, but the first thing that popped into my mind when I saw that the fire had gone out was that perhaps there were no matches left in the town. I ran to the match-safe so fast that I bumped my head against the wall. The safe was almost full, and then it struck me that there were probably matches in half the houses in town, and that I even had some in my pocket.

I went over and peeped out of one corner of a window-pane where the wind had come in and kept back the frost. The snow was driving down the street like a whirling cloud of fog. I could hardly see the bank building opposite. An awful feeling like sinking came over me as I realized how matters stood; and

the worst of it was that I had brought it upon myself. I rushed into the dining-room and looked out of a side window to see if the train might not be coming back; but there was only the whirlwind of snow. I went back in the office and threw myself on a lounge in one corner.

If any one says that I lay there with my face in a corn-husk pillow and cried as if I were a girl, I'm not going to dispute him. If any girl thinks that she can cry harder than I did, I'd like to see her try it. But it, or something, made me feel better, and after a while I could think a little. But I could not get over knowing that it was all my own fault, and that I might be riding away on the train with friends, and with people to see and talk to. I realized that it was all my quick temper and stubbornness which was to blame, and remembered how my mother had told me that it would get me into trouble some day. "If Tom hadn't come at me so suddenly," I said out loud, with my face still in the husk pillow, "I'd have agreed to it. Dear old Tom, he meant all right, and I was a fool!"

When at last I sat up I found it was so dark

that I could hardly see. The wind was roaring outside, and I could feel fine snow against my face from some crack. I was stiff and cold, and just remembered that I had not had above a quarter of a meal all day. I thought I heard a scratching at the door, and opened it. Something rushed in and almost upset me; then I knew it was Kaiser, Sours's dog. I was never so glad to see anything before. I dropped down on my knees and put my arms around his neck and hugged him, and for all I know I may have kissed him. I guess I again acted worse than a girl. I remember now that I *did* kiss the dog.

I got up at last and felt around till I found the match-safe, and lit the wall lamp over the desk. I thought it made it so I could actually see the cold. Kaiser seemed warm in his thick coat of black hair, and wagged his tail like a good fellow. I don't know why it was, but I thought I had never wanted to talk so badly before. "We're glad they're gone, aren't we, Kaiser?" I said to him; then I thought that sounded foolish, so I didn't say anything more, but set to work to build the fire.

When I went to the shed at the back door for the kindling-wood I found another friend, this time our cat, a big black-and-white one. I don't think I was quite so foolish about her as I had been about the dog, but I was glad to see her. After the fire was started I got a shovel and cleared the snow out of the office. Outside it was already banked half-way up the door, and the storm was still raging.

As I turned from putting some coal on the fire I happened to see the hotel register lying on the desk. Another foolish notion seized me, and I took up the pen and as well as I could with my stiff fingers headed a page "December 17th," and below registered myself, "Judson Pitcher, Track's End, Dakota Territory." I think the excitement must have turned my brain, because I seemed to be doing silly things all the time.

But I managed to stop my foolishness long enough to get myself some supper; which I guess was what I needed, because I acted more sensibly afterward. Everything in the house was frozen, but I thawed out some meat, and ate some bread without its being thawed, and boiled a couple of eggs, and had a

meal which tasted as good as any I ever ate, and with enough left for Kaiser and the cat, who was named Pawsy, though I can't imagine where such a name came from.

The office was by this time quite comfortable. I had brought a small table in from the kitchen and eaten my supper close to the stove. Though it was pitch-dark outside, it was not yet six o'clock, and as I felt calmer than I had before, I sat down in front of the fire to consider how matters stood. I think I realized what I was in for better than before, but I no longer felt like crying. If I remember aright, it was now that I gave the first thought to Pike and his gang.

"Well," I said, speaking out loud, just as if there was somebody to hear me besides a cat and a dog, "I guess Pike won't do much as long as this storm lasts. But after that, I don't know. Maybe I can hide if they come." I thought a minute more and then said: "No, I won't do that—I'll fight, if I have a chance. They won't have any way of knowing that I am here alone, and if I can see them first I'll be all right." That is what I *said;* but I remember that I felt pretty doubtful about it

all. I think I must have been trying not to let Kaiser know that I was afraid.

After a while I fell to thinking of home and of my mother. When I thought of how she would worry when she didn't hear from me, it gave me an idea of leaving Track's End and trying to make my way east to civilization. It seemed to me that with a few days of good weather I ought to be able to get through if no more snow came; though I had no idea how far I might have to go, since for all I knew Lac-qui-Parle might also be abandoned; and, even if it were not, I knew that it had no trains and that I would probably have to travel overland to the other side of the Minnesota line before I could reach a settlement with any connection with the outside world. I was before long very gloomy thinking about my troubles; then I happened to remember the horses and cow about which I had tried to quarrel with poor Tom Carr, and I put on my overcoat and went out to look after them.

I thought the wind would carry me away, and I had to shovel ten minutes by the light of a lantern half blown out before I could get the door open. But when I did get in I found

them glad to see me; and I was glad to see them. And while shoveling away the snow I had shoveled away my fit of the blues; and from that day to this I've taken notice that the best way to get rid of trouble and feelings you don't want is to go to work lively; which is a first-class thing to remember, and I throw it in here for good measure.

The cow mooed at me, and even the horses whinnied a little, though they were not what you might call children's pets, being broncos, and more apt to take a kick at you than to try to throw you a kiss. The chickens had gone to roost and didn't have much to say. They refused to come down for their supper, but the horses and the cow were very glad to get theirs. Then I milked the cow, told them all good-night, made everything about the barn as snug as I could, and shouldered my way through the storm to the house. I found both Kaiser and Pawsy wide awake and waiting for me. I don't think they liked the house being so deserted and lonesome. I gave them both some of the warm milk, and took a share of it myself.

I was beginning to realize that I was tired

by this time, and sat down in a big chair before the fire. The stove was a round, cast-iron one, shaped a good deal like a decanter. It burned soft coal, and, as it was going well, and was warm enough in the room, I threw the door open, making it seem very like a fireplace. I was over the excitement of the day, and fell to looking at the situation again. This is the way I made it out, to wit:

First, that I was alone, except for the animals, and in charge of a whole town; that it was very improbable (as the blizzard still held) that any train would or could get through very soon—perhaps not before spring.

Second, that the animals consisted of one large, shaggy, black dog (breed uncertain) named Kaiser; one large black-and-white cat named Pawsy; one cow named Blossom; two bronco horses, one named Dick, the other Ned; twenty-two hens and one rooster, without any particular names except that I called one of the hens Crazy Jane.

Third, that there was enough hay in the barn for the horses and cow, though other feed would be short unless I could find more about town somewhere; that I ought to be able to

scare up enough food for myself by going through the stores, though some kinds might be short; that there was plenty of coal.

Fourth, that there were guns of all kinds, and probably a good supply of ammunition.

Fifth, that there might be $20,000 in a safe across the street.

Sixth, that there was a gang of cutthroats somewhere about who wanted the money, and would come after it the minute they knew I was alone; and might come sooner.

By this time I was sleepy; so I covered up Kaiser on one end of the lounge, the cat on the other, put out the lamp, and went up-stairs and popped into bed.

CHAPTER VI

Some Account of what I do and think the first Day alone: with a Discovery by Kaiser at the End.

I WOKE up with a start in the morning, thinking that it was all a bad dream; then I knew it wasn't, and wished it were; and next I was very glad to hear the blizzard still roaring as hard as ever, which may seem odd to you. But the fact is that I had thought a long time after I went to bed and had decided on two things—first, that I was safe from the robbers as long as the storm lasted, and, second and more important, that I had a plan which might serve to keep them away for a while at least after the storm stopped. I got up and looked out of the window, but I might as well have looked into a haystack for all I saw. I could not even see the houses on the other side of the street.

I went down, said good-morning to the cat and dog, and started the fire. It was colder;

I peeped at the thermometer through the window, and saw it was a dozen degrees below zero. I found the stock at the barn all right and cheerful; the chickens were down making breakfast of what I had given them for supper, all except Crazy Jane, who had finished eating and was trying to get out of the barn, maybe thinking that she could make a nest in a snowbank, or could scratch for angleworms.

After I had finished the barn-work I went in and got breakfast. I started a fire in the kitchen and got a better meal than I had the night before. I went down cellar after some potatoes, and noticed that there were a plenty of them; with squashes, pumpkins, and other vegetables; all of which I knew before, but I observed that such things looked different to me now. I couldn't count much on the pumpkins because I didn't know how to make pumpkin pie, but I knew that the cow would be very glad to get them without their being made into pie. "It would be funny," I said, out loud, as if there were somebody to hear, "if cows should find out some day that pumpkins are better in pies and farmers should have

to fix them that way before they would eat them."

I found that I felt much better about the situation than I had the night before, though, of course, I still wished with all my heart that I was out of it all, and thought every minute what a fool I was to have acted the way I did. But there were so many things to do that I did not have time to worry very much, which I believe was all that kept me from going crazy.

After breakfast I decided that the first thing I had best do was to look up the gun question. I found Sours's rifle in a closet. It was not loaded, but there was a box of cartridges on a shelf, and I wiped out the barrel and filled the magazine. It was fifteen-shot and forty-five caliber, and seemed like a good gun. I stood it under the counter in the office and out of sight behind an old coat. In the drawer of the desk was a revolver. It was a thirty-eight caliber, and pretty big to carry, but I thought it might be handy to have, so I stuffed it in my pocket.

Taggart's hardware store was two doors toward the railroad from the hotel, but the sidewalk was so covered with snow, and the

wind swept down the street with such fury, that it seemed next to impossible to get there. But I was anxious to see about the weapons, so I went out the back door and crept along close to the rear of the buildings till I reached it.

The door was locked, but I could see through a window that a box had been recently broken open; but, as there were no guns in sight, I concluded that the men had probably carried them over to the depot. I tried to see this through the driving snow, but could not, so I did not dare to start out to find it, knowing how easy it is to become confused and lost in such a storm.

As I stood back of the store I thought once that I heard the whistle of a locomotive; then I knew of course it was only the wind. "It'll be a long time before you hear any such music as that," I said to myself. There was nothing which would have sounded quite so good to me.

I was glad to get back to the house, where I could draw a breath of air not full of powdered snow. I spent some time calking up cracks around the windows, where the snow blew in. While I was doing this it suddenly flashed into

my mind, what if I should lose track of the days of the month and week? I thought I would write down every day, and got a piece of paper to begin on, when I noticed a calendar behind the desk. I took the pen and scratched off "December 17," which was gone, and which was the beginning of my life alone in Track's End; and the first thing every morning after that while I stayed I marked off the day before; and so I never lost my reckoning. Though, indeed, I was soon to wake up in another and worse place than Track's End; but of this I will tell later. I had very foolishly forgotten to wind the clock the night before, and it had stopped, and I had no watch by which to set it; but I started it, and trusted to find the clock at the depot still going, as it was an eight-day one.

I soon found myself hungry, and took it for granted that it was dinner-time. The meals seemed pretty lonesome, because I had been used to having a great deal of fun with Tom Carr and the others at such times, much of it about my poor cooking. Kaiser and Pawsy appeared willing to do what they could to make it pleasant; and this time I put a chair

MY FAMILY AND I AT A MEAL, TRACK'S END

at one end of the little table, and the cat jumped up in it and began to purr like a young tiger, while the dog sat on the floor at the other end and pounded the floor with his tail like any drummer might beat his drum. I also began to get them into the bad practice of eating at the same time I did; but I had to have some company.

It must have been two hours after dinner, and I was moving my bed down into a little room between the office and kitchen, when I first saw that the fury of the wind was beginning to lessen. The sky began to lighten up, and from the front door I could soon catch glimpses of the railroad windmill. I saw that I must start the plan I had thought of the night before for keeping off the Pike gang without any delay. My idea was that I must not let them know that I was alone, and if possible make them think that there were still a good many people in town. I doubted if they had known the morning they left the letter that we were then reduced to six. I could not see how they should know it, and I felt sure that if they had known it they would have made an attack upon the bank.

My plan, then, was to build and keep up fires in several other houses, so that if they came in sight they would see the smoke and think that there was still a good-sized population. I went first across the street to the bank building. The lower part of it was locked, but I went up the outside stairs and found everything in Mr. Clerkinwell's rooms as we had left it. There were also inside stairs, and I went down and soon had a good fire going in the lower room, and as I came out I was pleased to see that it made a large smoke.

I next went to the north end of the street, where stood a building which had been a harness shop. It was locked, but I could see a stove inside; so I broke a back window, reached in with a stick, and shot back the bolt of the rear door, and soon had a good smoky fire here, too. I decided that one more would do for that day, and thought the best place for that would be in the depot. The wind had now pretty well abated, and the snow was only streaming along close to the ground.

The depot was locked, but again I got in by breaking a window. There were the guns as I expected—five new Winchesters like Sours's.

There were also a lot of cartridges, and three large six-shooters, with belts and holsters. It was half-past three by the clock, which was still going. I clicked at the telegraph instrument, but it was silent. I remembered that Tom had told me that the line had gone down beyond Siding No. 15, which was the first one east from Track's End. Everything made me think of Tom, and I looked away along the line of telegraph-poles where I knew the track was, down under the snow; but I could see no train coming to take me out of the horrible place.

I soon had another fire going. After that I hid two of the rifles in the back room and carried the others over to the hotel. I climbed to the top of the windmill tower and took a look at Mountain's house with the field-glass, but could see nothing. I walked around town and looked in each of the houses with an odd sort of feeling, as if I half owned them. Kaiser went with me, and was very glad to get out.

It was just after sundown when I got back to the door of the hotel. Up the street in front of the harness shop I saw a jack-rabbit sitting up and looking at me. Kaiser saw

him, too, and started after him, though the dog ought to have known that it was like chasing a streak of lightning. I stood with my hand on the door-knob watching the rabbit leave the dog behind, when suddenly I saw Kaiser stop as another dog came around Frenchman's Butte. They met, there was a little tussle, which made the snow fly; then I saw Kaiser coming back on a faster run than he had gone out on, with the other dog close behind.

"That's a brave dog I've got!" I exclaimed. I saw some other dogs come around the Butte, but I didn't look at them much, I was so disgusted at seeing Kaiser making such a cowardly run. On he came like a whirlwind. I opened the door and stepped in. He bolted in between my legs and half knocked me over. I slammed the door shut against the other dog's nose. The other dog, I saw, was a wolf.

CHAPTER VII

I have a Fight and a Fright: after which I make some Plans for the Future and take up my Bed and move.

I DON'T know if the door really struck the wolf's nose or not, when I slammed it shut, but it could not have lacked much of it. Poor Kaiser rushed around the stove, faced the window, and began to bark so excitedly that his voice trembled and sounded differently than I had ever heard it before. I must have been a little excited myself, as I stopped to bolt the door, just as if the wolf could turn the knob and walk in. When I stepped back I met the wolf face to face gazing in the window, with his eyes flaming and mouth a little open. He was gaunt and hungry-looking. The rest of the pack were just coming up, howling as loud as they could.

I ran to the desk and got the rifle; then I dropped on one knee and fired across the room

straight at the wolf's throat. He fell back in the snow dead; and, of course, there was only a little round hole in the window-pane. Everything would have been all right if it had not been for a mean spirit of revenge in Kaiser, for no sooner did he see his enemy fall back lifeless than with one jump he smashed through the window and fell upon him savagely. He had not seen the rest of the pack, but the next second half a dozen of them pounced on him. I dared not fire again for fear of hitting him, so I dropped my gun, seized an axe which I had used to split kindling-wood, and ran forward. There was a cloud of snow outside, and then the dog tumbled back through the window with one of the wolves, and they rolled over and over together on the floor.

I got to the window just as a second wolf started to come through the broken pane. I struck him full on the head with the axe, and he sank down dead, half outside and half inside. The others that pressed behind stopped as they saw his fate and stood watching the struggle on the floor through the window.

Kaiser was making a good fight, but the wolf was too much for him, and soon the dog

was on his back with the wolf's jaws at his throat. This was more than I could stand, and I turned and struck at the animal with my axe. I missed him, but he let go his hold, snapped at the axe, and when I started to strike again he turned and jumped through the window over his dead companion and joined the howling pack on the snow-drift in front of the house.

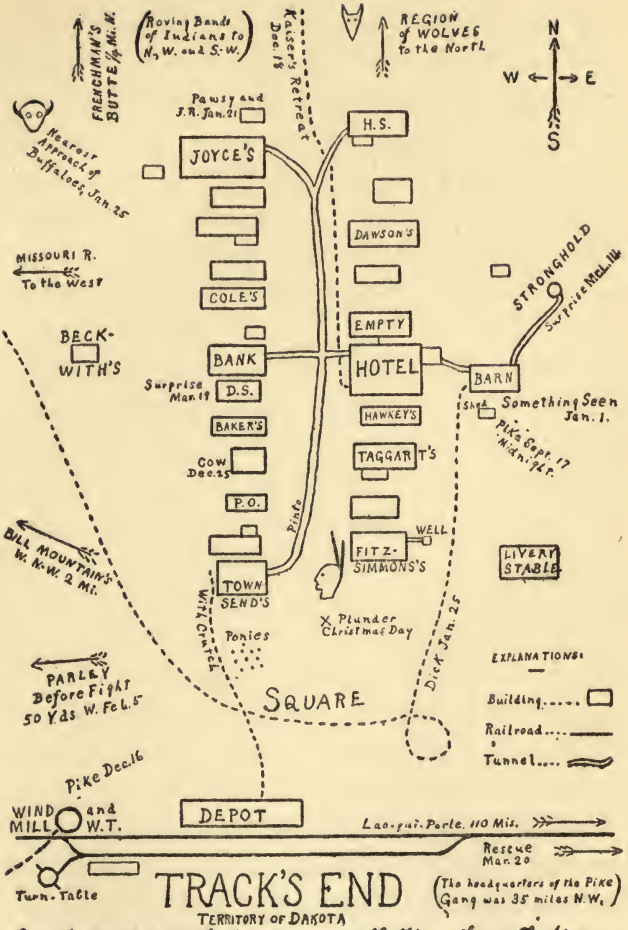
I seized the gun again and rested it across the dead wolf, firing full at the impudent rascal who had come in and made Kaiser so much trouble. It was a good shot, and the wolf went down in the snow. I pumped up another cartridge, but the wolves saw that they were beaten, and the whole pack turned tail and ran off as fast as their legs could carry them. I took two more shots, but missed both. The wolves went around Frenchman's Butte, never once stopping their howling.

As soon as they were out of sight I had a look at Kaiser. I found him all blood from a wound in his neck, and one of his fore legs was so badly crippled that the poor beast could not bear his weight on it. I got some warm water and washed him off and bound up his

throat. When I was done I heard a strange yowl, and, looking about, spied Pawsy clinging on top of the casing of the door which led into the dining-room, with her tail as big as a bed-bolster. I suppose she had gone up early in the wolf-fight, not liking such proceedings. She was still in the greatest state of fright, and spat and scratched at me as I took her down.

I next swept up the dog and wolf fur and cleaned the floor, and after I had got the place set to rights nailed a board over the broken window and carried the three dead wolves into the kitchen, where, after supper, I skinned them, hoping that some day their hides would go into the making of a fur overcoat for me; something which I needed.

I don't know if it was the excitement of the fight, or the awful stillness of the night, or what it was, but after I had finished my work and sat down in the office to rest I fell into the utmost terror. The awful lonesomeness pressed down upon me like a weight. I started at the least sound; dangers I had never thought of before, such as sickness and the like, popped into my mind clear as day,



Correct, according to the best of my recollection. This is the first map I ever made. J.P.

and, in short, I was half dead from sheer fright. There was not a breath of wind outside, or a sound, except once in a while a sharp crack of some building as the frost warped a clapboard or sprung out a nail; and at each crack I started as if I had been struck. The moon was shining brightly, but it was much colder; the thermometer already marked twenty degrees below zero.

Suddenly there came, clear and sharp, the savage howling of a pack of wolves; it seemed at the very door. I jumped out of my chair, I was so startled, and stood, I think, a most disgraceful picture of a coward. Kaiser rose up on his three sound legs and began to growl. At last I got courage to go to the window and peep out, with my teeth fairly chattering. I could see them up the street, all in a bunch, and offering a fine shot; but I was too frightened to shoot. After a while they went off, and it was still again. I wondered which was worse, their savage wailing or the awful stillness which made the ticking of the clock seem like the blows of a hammer. I wished that there might come another blizzard.

But at last I got so I could walk the floor;

and as I went back and forth I managed to look at things a little more calmly. The first thing I decided on was that I must no longer, in good weather at least, sleep in the hotel. It was easy to see, if the robbers came in the night and found nobody in the other houses, that they would come straight to the hotel. I made up my mind to take my bed to some empty house where they would be little likely to look for any one, or where they would not be apt to look until after I had had warning of their coming.

Another thing which I decided on was that I must keep up two or three more fires, and get up early every morning to start them. I saw, too, that I ought to distribute the Winchesters more, and board up the windows of the bank, and perhaps some of the other buildings, leaving loopholes out of which to shoot. Still another point which I thought of was this: Suppose the whole town should be burned? I wondered if I could not find or make some place where I would be safe and would not have to expose myself to the robbers if they stayed while the fire burned, as they probably would. I thought of the cellars, but

it did not seem that I could make one of them do in any way.

My fright was, after all, a good thing, because it made me think of all possible dangers, and consequently, as it seemed, ways to meet them. It was at this time that the idea of a tunnel under the snow across the street from the hotel to the bank occurred to me; but I was not sure about this. Still, some way to cross the street without being seen kept running in my mind. In short, I walked and thought myself into a much better state of mind, and, though I still started at every sound, I was no longer too frightened to control myself.

When it came bedtime I decided to follow out my plan for sleeping away from the hotel without delay. There was an empty store building to the north of the hotel. It was new, and had never been occupied. I had often noticed that one of the second-story windows on the side was directly opposite one in the hotel, and not over four feet away. I carried up the ironing-board from the kitchen, opened the hotel window, put the board over for a bridge, stepped across and entered the vacant building.

I thought I had never seen a place quite so cold before; but I carried over the mattress from my bed, together with several blankets, and placed them in a small back room in the second story. The doors and windows of the first story were all nailed and boarded up, and it seemed about the last place that you would expect to find any one sleeping. I left the dog and cat in the hotel, took one of the rifles with me, and pulled in my drawbridge. I almost dropped it as I did so, for at that instant the wolves set up another unearthly howling. I got into bed as quick as I could. They went the length of the street with their horrible noise; and then I heard them scratching at the doors and windows of the barn. I could have shot them easily in the bright moonlight; but I remember that I didn't do so.

CHAPTER VIII

I begin my Letters to my Mother and start my Fortifications: then I very foolishly go away, meet with an Accident, and see Something which throws me into the utmost Terror.

THE next day, the nineteenth of December, was Sunday. I had been left alone (or, rather, let me say the truth, I had like a fool refused to go) on Friday, which seems in this case to have been unlucky for me, however it may ordinarily be. I woke up early, half cramped with the weight of the bedclothes, I had piled on so many; but I was none too warm, either. I put out my drawbridge and got back to the hotel and started the fire. Outside the thermometer stood close to thirty-five degrees below zero, but the sun was rising bright and dazzling into a clear, blue sky.

Kaiser's leg was no better, and Pawsy was still nervous and kept looking at the windows

as if she expected wolves to bolt in head-first; and I did not blame her much. It seemed to me that the wolves had howled most of the night. I only wished that the timber beyond Frenchman's Butte and the coteaux and the Chain of Lakes were a hundred miles away, for without them there would have been no wolves, or nothing but little prairie wolves or coyotes, which, of course, don't amount to much.

As soon as my own fire was started I went about town and got the others going; this I called "bringing the town to life." As I stood at the depot and watched the long columns of smoke from the chimneys it scarcely seemed that I was the only inhabitant of the town. After I had had breakfast and done up the work at the barn, I sat down in the office and was glad enough that it was Sunday. I suddenly thought of a way to spend the day, and in ten minutes I was at something which I did every Sunday while I stayed at Track's End.

This was to write a letter to my mother, stamp and direct it, and drop it in the slot of the post-office door. Of course it would not go

very soon, but if nothing happened it would go some time; and, I thought, if I am killed or die in this dreadful place, the letters may be the only record she will ever have of my life here.

I accordingly set to work and wrote her a long letter, telling her fully everything that had happened so far, but without much of my fears for the future. I told her I was sorry that I had got myself into such a scrape, but that, now being in, I meant to go through it the best I could.

The next morning, Monday, I began work on my fortifications, by which name I included everything that would help to keep off invaders. I started two more fires, one in Townsend's store, at the south end of the street, and the other in Joyce's store, at the north end of town and nearly opposite the harness shop. I made another visit to Taggart's, and found some barrels of kerosene, which I needed, and more ammunition. Still another thing was a number of door-keys, so that I made up a string of them with which I could unlock almost every door in town. In Joyce's, besides groceries and such things, I found a buffalo overcoat, which I took the

liberty of borrowing for the winter. It was so large for me that it almost touched the ground, but it was precisely what I needed, and, I think, once saved my life; and that before long.

I kept at the fortification-work for four days pretty steadily, though I did not use the best judgment in picking out what to do first. I was fascinated, boy-like, with the tunnel idea, when, I think, with the knowledge I then had, it would have been wiser to have paid more attention to some other things; but, as luck would have it, it all came out right in the end. I boarded up a few of the windows, but not many, and did nothing whatever at providing a secret retreat in case of fire, though I had a plan in mind which I thought was good. Worst of all, I left the Winchesters about here and there without any particular attempt at hiding them. But I kept at the tunnel hammer and tongs.

There were two front windows in the hotel office. At one of these the snow came only a little above the sill, which was the one where the wolf had come in; but the other was piled nearly to the top. It was even higher against

the bank front opposite, and at no place in the street between was it less than four feet deep. Both buildings stood almost flat on the ground. I took out the lower sash of the window in the hotel and began work. I made the tunnel something over two feet wide and about four high, except where the drift was no more than this, where I did not think it safe to have the tunnel over three feet high. The snow was packed remarkably hard, and, as it all had to be carried out through the office in a basket and emptied in the street, it was slow work. But at last, on Thursday evening, it was done, and Kaiser and I passed through it; but nothing could induce the cat to come nearer than the window. I was very proud of my work, and went through the tunnel twenty times with no object whatever.

The next morning I ought to have gone at other fortification-work, but instead I thought up the foolish notion that I ought to go out to Bill Mountain's to see if Pike had got our letter and had left any in reply. It was Friday, the day before Christmas, and I thought that the holiday would be more satisfactory if I knew about this; though, to tell the truth, I had not

worried much about the gang's coming since I had been so taken up with the tunnel. I had been so careless that I might have been surprised twenty times a day.

It was a pleasant morning, and not very cold. Andrew had left behind a pair of skees, or Norwegian snow-shoes—light, thin strips of wood, four inches wide and eight or ten feet long—and, though I had never been on them but once or twice, I determined to use them in going. I fixed the fires well, made everything snug about town, gave the stock in the barn some extra feed, put on my big overcoat, with a luncheon in one pocket and Sours's revolver in the other, and started. Kaiser's leg was still a little stiff, but I let him go along.

I think I fell down three times before I got out of town; it was as many as this at least; and outside of town, there being more room, I fell oftener. But I soon began to improve and get along better. I decided to follow the railroad grade west, as it was most of the way higher than the prairie, and the snow on it was smoother.

When I got opposite Mountain's I found the grade some ten or twelve feet above the

prairie, but it looked a very easy matter to slide down on the skees. I had seen Andrew go down the steep side of Frenchman's Butte. I accordingly slid, went wrong, fell, turned my ankle, and found myself on the hard snow at the bottom unable to stand on my feet.

I lay still some time thinking that perhaps my ankle might get better; but it got worse. It was still almost half a mile to Mountain's, but it was over two miles back to town. I felt that I might be able to crawl the half-mile, so I started, with the skees on my back. I hope I may never again have to do anything so slow and painful. Kaiser was prodigiously excited, and jumped around me and barked and said as plainly as words that he would like to help if he could. But, though I thought a hundred times that I should never reach there, I kept burrowing and floundering along and did accomplish it at last. It was far past noon. The sky had clouded over. I saw a new letter behind the board, but could not rise up to get it. I pushed open the door, crawled to the heap of hay by the stove, and lay on it, more miserable, it seemed, than ever before.

I scarcely stirred till I noticed that it was beginning to get dark. Then I crept to the door and looked out; the snow was falling fast and in big flakes. I shut the door and crawled back to the hay. There seemed to be nothing to do. I knew I could not keep up a hay fire, even if I could start one. Besides, I had a sudden fear that some of the Pike gang might visit the shanty to look for an answer to their letter, and I thought if I simply lay still I might escape, even if they did come. I ate part of my luncheon, and gave Kaiser part. Then I drew my big overcoat around me as best I could, made the dog lie close up to me on the hay, and tried to sleep.

My ankle pained me a good deal, and the bed was not comfortable. I thought as I lay there that my mother and father and all the folks at home must then be at the church for the Christmas-tree; and I could see the lights, and the bright toys on the tree, and all the boys and girls I knew getting their presents and laughing and talking; and the singing and the music of the organ came to me almost as if I had been there. Then I thought of how, if I were home, later I should hang up my stocking

and find other gifts in it in the morning, and of what a pleasant time Christmas was at home.

Every few minutes a sharp twinge of pain in my ankle would bring me back to my deplorable condition there in that deserted shack sunk in the frozen snow, and I would be half ready to cry; but, with all my thinking of both good and bad, I did at last get to sleep. Once, some time in the night, I woke up with a jump at a strange, unearthly, whooping noise which seemed to be in the room itself, but at last I made it out to be an owl to-whooing on the roof. Again I heard wolves, very distant, and twenty times in imagination there sounded in my ears the tramp of Pike's horses.

When morning came I crawled to the door again. There were six inches of soft, new snow, but the sun was rising clear, and there were no signs of a blizzard. I got back to the hay and for a long time rubbed my ankle. I thought it was a little better. I ate the rest of the food and called myself names for ever having left the town. The fires, I knew, were out, and everything invited an attack of the robbers, while I lay crippled in a cold shack two miles away, on the road along which they

would come and go. I had been in no greater terror at any time since my troubles began than I was now on this Christmas morning.

Perhaps it was nine o'clock when I noticed that Kaiser was acting very peculiarly. He stood in the middle of the room with his head lowered and a scowl on his face. Then I saw the hair on his back slowly begin to rise; next he growled. I told him to hush, and waited. I could hear nothing, but I knew there must be good cause for his actions.

At last I could stand it no longer. I dared not open the door, but I seized one corner of the dry-goods box, drew myself up, and hobbled to the window, regardless of the pain. Going straight for the town, a quarter of a mile away, were a dozen men on horseback. I could see by their trail that they had passed within fifty yards of where I was.

CHAPTER IX

More of a strange Christmas: I make Kaiser useful in an odd Way, together with what I see from under the Depot Platform.

I THINK Kaiser was the best dog that ever lived. When I looked out of the window, what with seeing the men and with the pain which shot through my leg from my ankle, I sank down on the floor in a kind of faint. How long I lay there I know not, but when I came to Kaiser was standing over me licking my face. When he saw me open my eyes and move he uttered a sort of a whine, half like a cry and half like a little laugh, and began wagging his tail. I put my arms around his neck and drew myself up so that I was sitting on the floor. At this he began to bound about and bark as if he would say, "Cheer up, Jud; this is bad luck, but we will get through yet!"

The pain in my ankle was half killing me,

and suddenly it drove me desperate. I seized my foot in my hands, drew it up into my lap, and gave it a wrench that was like to break it off. I felt something crack inside, and half the pain stopped. "I've fixed it!" I cried to Kaiser, and tried to get up, thinking I could walk; but I went down in a heap, and saw that, though it was better, I was still far from walking. The ankle was swelled to twice its right size; but I felt sure that it must now improve.

I made Kaiser stop his fuss and pulled open the door. I could just make out the horsemen going along the grade almost to the town. I crawled to the hay, and thought a long time. In the first place, I knew the fires were all out and that the new snow had covered all traces of any life about the town. The robbers would find the place deserted and would go to work upon the safe. How long it would take them to open it I did not know, but one of the many things I now regretted was that, while fooling around with my tunnel, I had neglected to take out and hide the tools that were in Beckwith's blacksmith shop, as I had intended to do; for with these I did not think

it would take the men long to break into the safe.

After they had got the money two things might happen: they might take it and return west, in which case they would be almost sure to stop at Mountain's and discover me; in fact, the only thing I could not understand was why they had not stopped as they went in. I knew how much mercy I could expect from Pike and the kind of men that were with him.

The other course that they might take after getting the safe open was to stay in town for several days or even weeks; and in this case I should simply starve and freeze to death where I was. The reasons that made it seem likely that they would stay awhile were that there was no danger, plenty of food and fuel, and comfortable places to live and sleep. At first thought I saw one reason against it, and that was that there was no liquor in the town; and I knew they were the kind of men who would prize liquor higher than food. Then I remembered that, though the contents of the saloons had been shipped away when they were closed, I had heard there was a barrel of whiskey in the cellar of Fitzsimmons's grocery

store; and I knew, of course, that they would find it. I thought again of my detestable tunnel, for if I had not had my mind on it so much the barrel might have occurred to me and I could have disposed of it somehow.

I thought a long time, and this was the amount of it: That in any case I had best get back to town if I could. If I reached there while they were at work on the safe, I might be able to slip in unseen and hide somewhere till they were gone; and even if they did not go for some days, I might manage to keep out of sight and live after a fashion. Anything seemed better than staying where I was.

I was half dead from thirst, and it seemed that no harm could now come from a little fire; so I soon had one started and some snow melting in an old tin can. The drink and the warmth revived me a good deal, and I decided to start immediately to crawl to the town. I thought with good luck I might make it in four hours. It was now probably eleven o'clock. I left my skees and started out. Kaiser bounded around me in the greatest delight, barking and throwing up a cloud of snow. But before I had gone twenty rods I sank half fainting with

the pain of dragging my ankle. Poor Kaiser whined and licked my face. When I revived a little, I crept back and threw myself on the hay again, ready to die with despair.

I lay there half an hour in the greatest mental and physical pain; then an idea that drove it all away struck me like a flash. I sat up and drew the skees to me on the floor, and placed them parallel and about ten inches apart. Then I took one of the legs of the stove and pounded a board off of the dry-goods box. It was four feet long and a foot or more wide. I beat some nails out of the box, and then placed the board lengthways on top of the skees and nailed it firmly. This made me a sled, low but long and light.

I had on under my coat a jacket of coarse, strong cloth. This I took off and cut and tore up into strips, knotted them together, and made two stout ropes five or six feet long. I fastened one end of each of these to the front of the skees. Then I let out Kaiser's collar two or three holes, tied the other ends of my ropes to each side of it, making them precisely like harness traces, and pushed out of the door and sat down on my new sled. I had

like to have forgotten the letter on the door, but drew myself up and got it and put it in my pocket. There was a monstrous red skull and cross-bones on the outside of it.

If you think I did not have a time teaching that dog to draw me, then you are mistaken. The poor animal had not the least notion what I wanted of him, and kept mixing up his legs in the traces, coming back and bounding around me, and doing everything else that he shouldn't. I coaxed, and tried to explain, and worked with him, and at last boxed his ears. At this he sat down in the snow and looked at me as much as to say, "Go ahead, if you will, and abuse the only friend you have got!" At last I got him square in front, and, clapping my hands suddenly, he jumped forward, jerked the sled out from under me, and went off on the run with the thing flying behind.

I lay in the snow with my five wits half scared out of me, expecting no less than that he would be so terrified that he would run to Track's End without once stopping. But I made out to do what I could, and called "Kaiser! Kaiser!" with all the voice I had.

Luckily he heard me, got his senses again, and stopped. He stood looking at me a long time; then he slipped the collar over his head and came trotting back, innocent as a lamb, without the sled.

There seemed to be nothing to do but to crawl to the sled, so I started, with Kaiser tagging behind and not saying a word. I think he felt he had done wrong, but did not know exactly how. The crawling pained my ankle somewhat, but not so much as before, and I got to the sled at last. I saw that it was near the trail which the men on horseback had made, and this gave me an idea: perhaps Kaiser would follow that. I pushed on over, and as soon as he saw the trail he pricked up his ears, began to sniff at the snow and look toward the town. I hitched him up again, headed him the right way, took a good hold, and shouted, "Sic 'em, Kaiser!" He started off like a shot and ran till he was quite out of breath.

After he had rested and I had petted and praised him, we went on. He understood now what was wanted, and made no further trouble. We soon got up on the grade, and found it

much smoother. Indeed, the horses had left a very good road, and by sitting well back on my odd sled, so that the board would not plow up the snow, it was not at all hard for Kaiser to draw me. We were soon near enough to the town, so that I began to tremble for fear of being seen. My eyes were troubling me a good deal; it was snow-blindness, but, as I had never heard of it, I was frightened, not knowing what to think.

I could see the horses standing in a bunch in the open square between the depot and town, but the men were nowhere in sight, and I doubted not they were hard at work on the safe. After a good deal of labor I managed to get Kaiser to turn off to the south until the railroad buildings were between us and the town. Then I struck out straight for the water-tank, and in a few minutes was up to it.

The space below the tank was inclosed, making a round, dark room filled with big timbers. One of my keys fitted the door, and I opened it, put Kaiser and the sled inside, and shut the door. The poor dog thought this was poor payment for his work, but I could not trust him loose. I picked up a narrow

piece of board and broke it to the right length for a crutch, and so managed to hobble along upright to the end of the station platform. This was three or four feet from the ground, and beneath it were a lot of ties, old boxes, and other rubbish. I crawled under and around to the side next to the town, and peeped over a log of wood.

The horses were standing in a huddle with their heads together, and I did not pay much attention to them. A little to one side I saw a big pile of blankets, bed-clothing, and other things taken from the hotel and stores; and on top of it all my guns and other weapons. I expected that they would take the guns, but was surprised at their bothering with the other stuff. I could hear no sounds of their working on the safe. All at once the door of Taggart's store opened and they came out carrying a lot of rope and other things. Then I saw that they were not the men I had thought, after all, but a band of Sioux Indians.

CHAPTER X

A Townful of Indians: with how I hide the Cow, and think of Something which I don't believe the Indians will like.

WHEN I saw what my visitors were I do not know if I was relieved or more frightened. I saw that I need no longer worry about the safe being robbed, but that seemed to be almost the only thing in their favor over the Pike gang. I knew, of course, that they had no ill feeling against me, and probably had no intention of harming any one; but, on the other hand, I well understood that if I should appear and try to stop their plundering the town they would not hesitate to kill me. By their dress I recognized them as Sioux from the Bois Cache Reservation, fifty or seventy-five miles north, because I had seen some of them during the fall while they were on their way to visit some of their relatives a hundred or more miles south at the Brulé Agency. I supposed they were going

for another such visit, and had blundered on the town. These Bois Cache Indians I knew were a bad lot; many of them had been with Little Crow in the great Sioux Massacre in Minnesota in 1862, when hundreds of settlers were killed.

They came directly to the pile of things near their horses, and put down the rope; and then they started off in all directions looking for more plunder. Two of them came to the depot and walked about on the platform over my head. I flattened out on the ground and scarcely breathed, expecting every minute that they would look under. I heard them talking and trying the windows. I thought they were going away; then there was a sound of breaking glass, and I heard them tramping about inside. Then they came out and went over to the pile again. I peeped out and saw that they had the two Winchesters which I had hidden in the depot. Another came from the town with a shot-gun which he had found somewhere. I had no doubt that they would find and carry off every weapon there was, and leave me with nothing except the small revolver which I had in my pocket.

For an hour I lay there under the platform watching the Indians plunder the town. They already had much more in their pile than they could possibly carry away with the horses they had. Suddenly I saw that their plan most likely was to get everything they wanted together in the open square and then to burn the town, carry off what they could, and come back after the rest later on. Of course this put me in a great fright, but, though I racked my brain as never before, I could think of no way to prevent it.

Soon I heard a great pounding, and suspected that they were breaking into the Headquarters barn, which I always kept locked, just out of force of habit. In another minute I knew I was right, as I heard a loud squawking of the chickens. Up from the direction of the barn and high over the roofs of the town I suddenly saw a bird soar, which I took to be a prairie chicken, or some sort of game bird, though where it came from I could not guess. Then, as it lit on the chimney of the blacksmith shop, and began a great cackling, I saw that it was only Crazy Jane. I could not help laughing, in spite of my troubles, and said out

THE BOIS CACHE INDIANS LOOTING THE TOWN ON CHRISTMAS D

loud, "Ah, it takes somebody smarter than an Indian to catch her!"

The sight of Crazy Jane and the sharp way she outwitted the savages did me good and made me wonder if I could not do as well; still I could think of nothing. Just then the Indians came out with the other chickens in grain-sacks, and leading Dick and Ned and Blossom. The horses they stood with their own, but I was horrified to see that they acted as if they were going to butcher the cow. One of them pointed a gun at her head and another began to flourish a knife. It looked as if they had got it into their savage heads that they wanted fresh beef and were going to slaughter the poor animal on the spot.

To watch these preparations was, I think, the hardest thing I had to bear that day. She was a patient, gentle heifer, and I could not bear to think of seeing her butchered by a lot of villainous savages with less intelligence than she had herself. If I had had a gun or any fit weapon, I verily believe that I should have rushed out and defended her. But just before they began, one of their number came out of Fitzsimmons's store and called to them,

and they all trotted over. The store was on the east side of the street.

At the instant that the last of them disappeared in the door I rolled out from under the platform and began to hobble across the square. My intention was to get behind the stores on the west side of the street; and I had a wild notion of saving the cow in some way, I did not know how. It was a foolhardy thing to do, but I got behind the first store without being seen. But I was no nearer the cow, who was a little ways from the side of Fitzsimmons's, and I dared not go there. She saw me, however, and I held out my hand and said, "Come, bossy!" and she came over. I took her by the horn and led her along behind the buildings, knowing no more than a fool what I should do with her. Just then I came to the sloping outside cellar-door behind a store. The Indians had cleaned the snow off of it, but had not succeeded in getting in, as it was fastened with a padlock. I tried my keys. One of them opened it. The stairs were not steep, and I led the cow down and closed the door above us. The Indians had walked and ridden everywhere in the square

and back of the stores, so I thought it would be hard for them to follow the cow's tracks. Nevertheless, the next moment I hurried back and with an old broom brushed lightly our trail behind the buildings; then returned to the cellar.

I rested a few minutes till my ankle felt better, then I crept up the inside stairs to the store and peeped out the front window. Four or five of the Indians were standing where the cow had been, looking in all directions. After a while they all went back into Fitzsimmons's store and I slipped down and out the door by which I had got in, locked it, and made my way behind the buildings to the bank and went in. Here the Indians had not disturbed anything, there being nothing to their taste; but when I looked out a crack in the boards over the window I saw the whole eleven of them at the end of the street holding a pow-wow over the disappearance of their fresh beef. I thought it would be a good time to test my great pet, the tunnel, so I hobbled boldly through and entered the hotel.

The first thing I saw was Pawsy in her old place over the dining-room door. She did not

seem to like Indians any better than she did wolves. Everything which had not been carried off was in the greatest confusion. The Winchester which had been under the counter was gone. I stood with my crutch looking at the wreck, when, without hearing a sound, I saw the knob of the front door turn and the door push open. With one bound like a cat I went through the open door of the closet under the stairs.

I had no time to close the door, and stood there pressed against the wall and trying not to tremble. It was dark in the closet, and that was my only hope. Three of the Indians filed by. They all wore moccasins, and their step was noiseless. They were talking, and passed on through into the kitchen and out-doors. I think they were looking for the cow, and took this as the best way to get to the barn. I pressed back farther in the closet and waited. Soon they came back, and again passed me, and went on out of the front door. I got out and crawled up-stairs, thinking to find a better hiding-place and wishing heartily that I was back under the platform. I looked out of an upper window and saw them all at

the farther end of the street again. By-and-by they went into Fitzsimmons's store.

Though I did not take my eyes off the store for two hours I saw no more of the Indians, and by this time it was so dark that I could no longer see them if they did come out. I began to hear a strange noise, and opened the window slightly and listened. It was the Indians shouting and singing. Then it dawned upon me that they had found the whiskey and that they were all getting drunk in Fitzsimmons's cellar.

This, of course, gave me a new cause of dread, for, if a sober Indian is bad, a drunken one is a thousand times worse. I felt sure that they would now set the town on fire through accident even if they did not intend to do so. The fiendish howling constantly grew worse and was soon almost as bad as that of the wolves ever was. I still could think of nothing to remedy matters. By this time it was pitch-dark. I determined to have a look at them, anyhow. It occurred to me that probably they had begun at the whiskey before the cow disappeared, and that this had helped to make their search unsuccessful.

I went down and out the back door of the hotel and crept along the rear of the buildings till I came to Fitzsimmons's. The yelling and whooping of those savages was something blood-curdling to hear. There was a window for lighting the cellar close to the ground in the rear foundation-wall. A wide board stood in front of it, but I dug the snow away, pushed this board a little to one side, and looked in. They seemed to be having a free fight, and many of them were covered with blood. A smoking kerosene lamp stood on a box, and around this they surged and fought and howled. As I looked the lamp was knocked to the floor and blazed up. One of the Indians fell on it and smothered the flames, and the struggling and diabolical yelling went on in the dark.

As suddenly as the plan of making the skee sled had flashed upon me came another plan for driving every Indian out of town. I jumped up and ran away as fast as a poor crutch and a leg and a half could carry me.

CHAPTER XI

I give the savage Indians a great Scare, and then gather up my scattered Family at the end of a queer Christmas Day.

HOW I ever got along through the darkness and snow on my crutch I scarce know, but in less time than it takes to say I tumbled in at the back door of the hotel. I went directly into the kitchen and felt about till I found a knife, which I put in my pocket. Then I stumped on into the office, leaned against the counter, and lit the wall lamp, took it out of its bracket, and made my way somehow to the cellar-door. I left my crutch and fairly slid down the stairs, holding the lamp in both hands above my head. Once down I set it on a small box, dropped on the cellar bottom, and drew over to me the largest pumpkin in the pile against the wall. What I thought to do was to make the most diabolical jack-lantern that ever was, and scare the

drunken savages out of what little wit they had left.

I took the pumpkin in my lap, and with the knife cut out the top like a cover. Then with my hands I dug out the seeds and festoons of stuff that held them. Then I turned up one side and plugged out two eyes and a long nose. I was going to make the corners of the mouth turn up, as I had always done when making jack-lanterns at home, but just as I started to cut it came to me that it would look worse if they turned down; so thus I made it, adding most hideous teeth, and cutting half of my fingers in my haste. Then I gave the face straight eyebrows and a slash in each cheek just as an experiment, and looked around for a candle.

I could see nothing of the kind, nor could I remember ever having noticed one about the house. For a moment I knew not what to do; then my eyes rested on the lamp, and I asked myself why that would not do as well as a candle, or even better, since it gave more light. The hole in the top was not big enough to take in the lamp, but I cut it out more, and with half a dozen trials, and after burning all the

fingers I had not already cut, I got the lamp in. The cover was now too small for the opening, but I grabbed another pumpkin and slashed out a larger one and clapped it into place. If I had had time I believe I should have been frightened at the thing myself, it was that hideous and unearthly-looking; but I did not have, so I took it under one arm, though it seemed half as big as a barrel, and pulled myself up-stairs.

In another minute I was outdoors and hobbling along as fast as I could. The howling of the red beasts in the cellar still came as loud as ever. I got to the window, dropped on my knees, and took away the board. They did not yet have a light, and were struggling and caterwauling in the dark like, it seemed, a thousand demons. But I say I had the worst demon with me.

The lamp was burning well. I set the thing on the ground, square in front of the window, with the horrible face turned in and looking down into the darkness. Then I rolled out of the way.

I had truly thought that those savages had been making a great noise before, but it had

been nothing to the sound which now came from the cellar. Such another shrieking and screaming I never heard before nor since. I would not have believed that any lot of human beings could make such an uproar. Then I heard them fighting their way up the stairs and go squawking and bellowing out the front door of the store.

When I heard the last one go I seized up the pumpkin, took it on one shoulder, and with my stick went hippety-hopping out through the alley and along the sidewalk after them. They were going away in the darkness for their ponies like the wind. I went to the end of the walk and, holding the lantern in both hands, raised and lowered and waved it at them. Not once did they stop their howls of terror, and I could hear and partly see them tumbling onto their ponies in all ways and plunging off through the drifts to the west like madmen. I longed to be on Dick's back with my lantern to chase them, but I knew not where Dick was, and my ankle had already borne too much, as it told me plainly. I got back to the hotel as best I could, put up the lamp in its place and sat down to rest.

But though I needed rest, I needed food more; so I started the fire and looked about for something to eat. I soon found that the Indians had left nothing except a few crusts of bread and some frozen eggs. But I boiled the eggs and made out a sort of a meal. As I finished I heard a yowl which I thought I knew, and, sure enough, when I looked up, there was the cat still on the door.

This set me to laughing, and I said: "I wonder was ever a family so scattered before on a Christmas night as is mine? There is Kaiser shut in under a water-tank; Blossom locked in the cellar of a grocery store; Crazy Jane, the hen, on top of the smoke-stack of a blacksmith shop; the rest of the chickens sacked up and scattered on the ground; Dick and Ned, the horses, I don't know where; Pawsy, the cat, on top of the door; and Jud himself, the head of the family, here eating what the Indians have left, with a hurt ankle and a smell of roasted pumpkin all through his clothes."

I had a good laugh over things, and then decided that I must do what I could for my scattered family, though my ankle seemed

about ready to go by the board. So I first got down the cat and then lit the lantern and started out after Kaiser. Poor dog, he was beside himself to see me, and liked to have knocked me down in showing how glad he was.

As we started back Kaiser stopped and began to growl at something out on the prairie, and I looked, and after a time made out Dick and Ned. They were very nervous, and would not let me come up to them, but I toiled around them at last and started them toward their barn. I next looked after Blossom. I found her lying down, as comfortable as you please, chewing her cud and right at home in the cellar. She had made a meal out of the coarse hay which came out of a crockery bale, and I thought I would leave her for the night. So I took a big pitcher out of the bale and milked her then and there, and took it home, and Kaiser and Pawsy and I disposed of it without more to-do.

I was beginning to feel better about my family, and felt still more so when I found that Dick and Ned had gone into their stalls and had stopped their snorting, and only breathed

hard when they saw me. Next I went after Crazy Jane; but though I coaxed and shooed, and threw chunks of frozen snow at her, while Kaiser barked his teeth loose, almost, it did no sort of good; she only looked at me and made a funny noise as a hen does when she sees a hawk. I could not climb up with my hurt ankle, so I had to leave her, much against my will. The chimney, I thought, was a good deal exposed for a sleeping-place in winter, but there was no wind and I didn't have much fear but that she would come out all right.

I had like to have forgotten the other chickens; they never popped into my mind till I was back in the hotel, but I dragged myself out after them. I found the poor things stuffed in three sacks, as if they had been turnips, lying on the snow. I knew I could not carry them, and felt that I could scarce drag them even; so I hit upon the plan of taking a bit of rope from the pile of plunder and hitching Kaiser to the sacks, and so in that way we got them, one by one, to the barn at last and let them out, all cramped and ruffled. Kaiser was so proud of his work that he set up a bark

which started the broncos into another fit of snorting.

I think if there had been one more member of my family lost that I could have done nothing for it that night, my ankle was in such a state. I tried bathing it in hot water, and before I went to bed I had it fairly par-boiled, which seemed greatly to relieve it. I was too tired to go across the drawbridge to my room, so I stretched out on the lounge in the office, not much caring if all the robbers in Christendom came. But I could not help wondering at my strange Christmas; and half the night I heard the wolves howling round the blacksmith shop and looking up (I knew) at Crazy Jane; but I thought they might as well howl around the gilt chicken on a weather-vane for all the good it would do them.

CHAPTER XII

One of my Letters to my Mother, in which I tell of many Things and especially of a Mystery which greatly puzzles and alarms me.

HERE I am going to put in the letter which I wrote to my mother a week from the next day after my strange Christmas, to show that I did write her long letters every Sunday, as I have said; though of course it was many weeks before she got this or the others:

TRACK'S END, *Sunday, January* 2d.

MY DEAR FATHER AND MOTHER,—I have written you so much bad news since I have been in this dreadful place that I am very glad to send you some good news at last, and that is that my ankle, of which I wrote you last Sunday, is all well. I kept up the hot-water applications and by the next morning it was so much better that I could walk on it. I hope I may not turn it again.

I don't know as there is much other good news to write, except that it is good news, and maybe quite strange news, that I am still alive at all in such a place. I am getting along better with the cooking, though I am beginning to long for some fresh meat. The cow still gives a good mess of milk, and I now get three or four fresh eggs a day; thanks to the warm food which I give the hens, I guess. I do not believe that Crazy Jane has laid an egg since her night on the chimney, and I'm almost afraid she caught cold, as she has not had a genuine fight with another hen since. Kaiser and the cat and Dick and Ned are all well and in good appetite. I have heard rather less of the wolves of late, and I still think it would be easier to get the Man in the Moon to come to this town than any of those Indians. But the outlaws I still fear very much. Oh, something I ought to have written you last week! I mean this: I got a letter from them that day out at Mountain's, but I had no time to read it Christmas and the next day I forgot I had it till after I had put your letter in the post-office. This is what was in it:

CITISENS TRACK'S END,—We will Rob your bank and burn your town if we don't get the small some we ask for. If adoing it we kill anyboddy it wun't be our fawlt. Leave the Munny as we told you to and save Bludd Shedd.

PIKE AND FRENDS.

I look for them any time. My only hope is that the weather will be too bad for them to travel; but of course there must be some good weather. The snow is already so deep that it will be very hard for them to do much on horseback. The street is full, and it is very deep north, east, and south. The ground is almost bare for half a mile to the west, however; and they could come in on the grade. Of course they can come on snow-shoes at any time and go everywhere. I cannot even hope to keep out of having trouble with them. I have made no answer to this letter, and can't make up my mind whether it would be best to do so or not.

I kept up work all the week on the fortifications, when the weather would permit; for there has been another great blizzard, the worst of the winter so far. I even worked all day yesterday, though it was New-Year's. Monday morning I again started all of my fires,

but I found that in three of the buildings there was not enough coal to last long. So I hitched up Ned and Dick on an old sleigh of Sours's and took a good lot to each place from the sheds at the railroad. It was a lucky thing I did so, too, because it snowed more Tuesday night and began to blizzard Wednesday and kept it up till Friday without once stopping; and it would now be impossible to drive anywhere near the coal-sheds.

I have got up a plan to do what I want to do without using much coal; I smother the fires, all except the one in the hotel, with stove griddles laid on them, and it makes a great smoke without much fire. The guns and ammunition I have disposed of here and there, in good places for me in case of attack, but hard to find for other folks. One I keep standing by my bed's head, but nobody would be apt to look there for either gun or bed, I hope. I take in my drawbridge always the minute I cross.

The last blizzard has helped me a good deal. The street is now so full that the first-story doors and windows of the hotel and bank and most of the other buildings are covered. Not

a bit of daylight gets into the hotel office, and I am writing this by lamplight, though the sun is bright outdoors. The hotel can now only be entered by the back door, which I have strengthened with boards and braces. I have also boarded up the second-story windows, as they are now not much above the level of the drifts.

My tunnel might now be much higher and I am going to make it so that I can stand up straight all the way through. This is the only way there is to get into the bank now, unless you were to pound off the planks I have nailed over the upper windows, or shovel the snow away below. I drew over lumber from the yard the day I had the team hitched up for the coal. There are plenty of nails at Taggart's. The blacksmith tools which would be good to break open a safe with I have buried in the snow. I have not yet carried out the plan I told you about which might save me in case the town is burned. It is a big job, but I am going at it as soon as I can. There is much other work which I want to do. There is a large tin keg of blasting-powder at Taggart's which it seems as if I ought to use

somehow. Sometimes I wish I had a cannon, but I don't know as it would be much use to me.

I had a vast deal of work Monday and Tuesday carrying back the things those savage Indians lugged out in the square. I fastened up all of the buildings which they had torn open and straightened up things in the stores as best I could. Fitzsimmons's was in the worst confusion, and I could not do much with it. The cellar was such a wreck of barrels and boxes and crates and everything you can think of, all broken open and the things thrown everywhere, that I only looked down and gave it up then and there.

As soon as I can get around to it I mean to build some more tunnels to some of the other houses. I think I ought to draw up a list of regular hours for getting up, fixing the fires, climbing the windmill tower to look with the field-glass, and such-like things, as I used to hear Uncle Ben tell was the way they did when he was in the army. I mean to go out every good day and take some target practice with my rifle.

I wish I could close this letter here, and I

would do so if it were going to you so that you would get it before you get others, or before you know that you are never to get others from me, if that is to be, as I fear it may. Oh, if I only had it to do over again, how quick I would take the chance to go away from this horrid place! If I live to get away I will never come here again. So I must tell you what little I can of this other matter.

I am not here in Track's End alone. What it is that is here I do not know. How long it has been here I do not know. Where it stays, what it does, where it goes, I do not know. I have looked over my shoulder twenty times from nervousness since I began this letter.

Last Monday night I hung a piece of bacon on a rafter in the shed back of the kitchen, after cutting off a slice for breakfast the next morning. I kept it there because it is a cool place and handy to the kitchen. Tuesday morning it was gone. I had left the outside door shut, and it was still shut in the morning. The door between the kitchen and shed was locked. I could see no tracks or marks of any kind.

Wednesday morning the thumb-piece of the

latch on the depot door was pressed down. I don't think I left it that way. A pail by the back door in which I had thrown some scraps which I was saving for the chickens was tipped over. I think some of the meat rinds were gone. The blizzard began that morning.

Thursday morning the blizzard was still going on. I noticed nothing unusual.

Friday morning a quilt and a blanket had been stolen from a bed in the hotel. Another quilt was drawn from the bed and lay on the floor. I think the window (it had not yet been boarded up) at the foot of the bed had been raised. The snowbank outside is high. The blizzard was still blowing.

Yesterday morning I saw nothing wrong, but I thought about it a good deal during the day. I remembered of hearing strange sounds at night from the first of my being here alone. I had thought it wolves, owls, jack-rabbits, or something like that.

Last night I decided to watch. The storm had stopped and the night was very still, but it was cloudy and dark and a flake of snow fell once in a while. I put on the big fur coat

and sat on a box just inside the woodshed door, which was open on a crack. At about eleven o'clock I heard a faint noise at the barn as if something were in the yard at the side trying to get in at one of the windows. I swung my door open a little more, it creaked and I saw something dark go across the yard and over the fence. There was no sound that I could hear. I could not see that it touched the ground. It went behind a haystack by the fence. There was instantly another glimpse of it as it passed beyond the stack, going either behind or through the shed under which the men stood that night when Pike shot Allenham. I was not sure if I saw it the other side of there or not, but I could not see so well beyond the shed. The motion was gliding; I heard no footstep, nor sound of wings, nor anything. It snowed some more in the night. This morning I could find nothing wrong except that a clothes-line beyond the shed was broken. It had hung across the way which what I saw must have gone. Its ends were tied to posts at least seven feet from the ground, and if I remember aright, it has all the time been drawn up so that it did not sag

at all. It was snapped off as if something had run against it.

I must close now and do up my work for the night. I only ask that I may live to see you all again. If I do not, then may this reach you somehow.

Your Dutiful Son,

JUDSON PITCHER.

CHAPTER XIII

Some Talk at Breakfast, and various other Family Affairs: with Notes on the Weather, and a sight of Something to the Northwest.

IT was on the morning of Tuesday, January 25th, as I sat at breakfast with Pawsy in her chair at one end and with Kaiser at the other, drumming on the floor for another bit of bacon, that I said to myself:

"It is just one month to-day since I clapped eyes on a human being; and the ones I saw then were not very good humans, being thieving and drunken Indians." And when I said this I had not forgotten (when had it been once out of my mind, waking or sleeping?) what I saw on New-Year's night; but I knew not if I were to count that as human or what.

I remember that Sunday night after I finished the letter to my mother which I put in the last chapter, how I found it darker than I expected when I went out, and how I ran along the snowbanks with my heart thumping

like to split, and threw the letter in the top of the post-office door (the rightful opening was long before buried under the snow) and then shot back to the hotel, not daring to look behind me or even stop to breathe. I was well ashamed of myself, at the time, but I could not help it.

On that night it was even nine o'clock before I could get up courage to go to the barn and feed the stock. I think I was in a greater state of terror than on the night after the battle with the wolves. I walked the floor, back and forth, on tiptoe and listened; and the less there was to hear, the more I heard. At last I, after a fashion, put down my fright, and ventured out to the barn; but even then I could not whistle; I tried, but my lips would not stay puckered.

I went to bed as soon as I could, and though I thought I should never get to sleep, I did at last. What my dreams were, or how many times I sat up in bed with a start, are things I do not like to think about. But notwithstanding this, I felt better in the morning and went at the work as hard as I could.

But though, as I say, up to the 25th of

January (and even beyond) I had no further glimpse of the mysterious visitor, I saw evidence of its presence often enough.

Night after night the scrap-pail by the back door was rummaged and something taken from it, and once a chicken was missing from the barn. The only way that anything could get in was through a window into the hay-loft seven or eight feet above the drift. After I missed the chicken I nailed this up and lost no more. I thought there were a few scratches on the side of the barn below the window, but I could tell nothing from them. Almost every night it either snowed or drifted, or both, so there was almost no hope of ever finding tracks of any kind on the ground. One morning I found the windmill at the station thrown into gear and running full tilt, but the lever which controlled it may have slipped. Two or three times I thought I heard the windlass of the well near the barn creak, but I tried to make myself believe that it was only the wind.

You may be sure that my sleep was very light, and I often heard Kaiser growling and barking late at night in the hotel. I never had the courage to sit up and watch again. I

may have been more cowardly than I should have been; I leave that to the reader to say. One night I lay awake listening to the wolves howling up at the north end of the town. Suddenly their cry changed and they swept the whole length of the street like the wind, and much faster than they usually went when simply ranging for prey. They may have been chasing a jack-rabbit.

Another night they howled so long right in front of the building I was in that I put down my foolish fears and got up and fired at them, hoping to scare them away and maybe get another skin for my coat. One fell, and the others made off at a great rate. I watched the one on the snow till I was sure he was dead, and I heard nothing more of the others that night. In the morning there was neither hide nor hair of the dead wolf.

But the work I had to do kept my mind off of my terror a good deal, and saved me, I really believe, from going stark mad. I will tell about my great system of tunnels presently, but before I began it I did much else. One of the first things was to make a long, light sled for Kaiser to draw, and also a har-

ness for him. The materials and tools for the one I got from the wagon-repair shop attached to Beckwith's blacksmith shop, and the same for the other from the harness shop, where I kept up one of my fires. I was always handy with all kinds of tools, inheriting a love for them from my father; besides, I had worked with him in the shop at home a good deal, and had thus become a fairly good mechanic for my age. I could handle a plane or a draw-shave or a riveting-hammer, or even an awl, for the matter of that, with any of them.

I used this dog rig chiefly for taking over ground feed from the depot to the barn for the horses and cow; but Kaiser learned to enjoy the work of dragging the sled so much that I soon came to use him nearly always in good weather in making my rounds to look after the fires or patrol the town. He would whisk me along on top of the frozen drifts at such a rate that it would nearly take my breath away sometimes. I practised with the skees till there was no danger of turning my ankle again, and would sometimes run races with him on them; but he could beat me all hollow unless there was a good, stiff load on the sled.

Another thing that I made was a pair of leather spectacles, something which my mother had used often to tell me I needed when I was small and could not see something that was plain as a pikestaff. My spectacles were made out of a strip of black leather two inches wide which went over my eyes and around my head, with two slits through which I could look. These I wore on the dazzling bright days and was troubled no more by snow-blindness, which had made my eyes so painful the day I came back from Mountain's.

It was about New-Year's that I began to spend my evenings in noting down in the hotel register what had happened during the day. I did this chiefly so that when I came to write to my mother Sunday I would forget nothing; and I am very glad now that I did so, for without the register and the letters (both of which I now have) about some things, especially dates, I might go wrong in writing this account. Besides, in the past, it has been much satisfaction when I have related any of the incidents of my winter at Track's End and some person, to show how smart he was, has tried to cast doubt on my word—it has

been much comfort to me, I say, in such cases to have the register and letters to show him, with it all set down in black and white.

Thus it comes I know that Pawsy caught a mouse in the barn on Wednesday, January 12th, at about half-past seven o'clock in the morning, while I was milking the cow. I think it was the only mouse at Track's End that winter, for I never saw or heard any other. There were no rats in the Territory then anywhere, unless it may have been at Yankton, or at some of the old Red River settlements about Pembina.

Pawsy was a good hunter, and several times caught a snowbird, though I boxed her ears for this; and on Friday, the 21st, I found her near Joyce's store trying to drag home a jack-rabbit. She must have caught it by lying in wait, but I marveled how she killed the monstrous creature. But she was, indeed, one of the largest and strongest cats I ever knew. I would have trusted her to whip a coyote in a fair fight. I got three jacks in January myself with the rifle, and found them very good to eat; but the first one, after skinning it, I left overnight in the shed, and in the morning

it was gone. That day I went to Taggart's and got two good bolts and put them on the shed door.

Getting my meals I found very hard work, but I made out better than you might think, since my mother had taught me something about cooking. At first I neglected getting regular meals, snatching a bite of anything that I could lay my hands on; but I soon saw that this would not do if I were to keep in good health and strength. My boarders, too, were great hands to complain if they did not get their meals regularly. You might have thought that cat and dog were paying good money for their board, the way they would mew and whine if a meal were late. I took very good care of the chickens, giving them plenty of warm food, so from about Christmas I got a dozen or more eggs each week. The cow, too, I fed well on ground feed and hay, with pumpkins and sometimes a few potatoes, and she gave me a fair quantity of milk all winter; and on the eggs and milk, together with potatoes, bacon, and salt codfish, I and my boarders managed to live tolerably well.

Pie I missed very much, and cookies and apple dumplings and such things, all of which my mother used to make very freely at home, and never keeping them hid. I looked longingly at the pumpkins, and once fetched a quantity of ginger from Joyce's, vowing I would attempt pumpkin pie; but I never got up my courage. Bread, also, I never attempted, though I got a package of yeast from the store and looked at it many times. The place of this was taken by pancakes, which I made almost every day, big and thick, which with molasses went very well; though a good cook, as like as not, would have said they were somewhat leathery.

There was not an apple in town, nor any kind of fresh fruit, but there were dried apples and prunes, and canned fruit and vegetables, especially tomatoes. Of the canned things I liked the strawberries best, and ate many, though they tasted somewhat of the tin. There were plenty of crackers in the stores, and some dry round things, dark-colored, which called themselves gingersnaps; I took home a large package in great glee, thinking I had made a find; I ate one of them

by main strength and gave the rest to the cow. Butter I made several times, with fair success, though it was not like mother's, being more greasy.

Fresh meat I missed very much, though the few jack-rabbits I got helped out, and were good eating, as I have said, and smelled as good as anything could while cooking. Some other fresh meat I had also, as you shall see directly. Once I made up my mind to have some chicken. There was one hen who was very fat and never, I was sure, laid an egg. I took the hatchet, which was sharp enough, and went to the barn, intending to behead her, having it all planned how I should cook her for my Sunday dinner. When I got to the barn the hen seemed to know what I intended, and she looked at me with one eye, very reproachful, and I went back to the house with my hatchet and never made any more plans for fried chicken.

There was much bad weather in January. Often I noticed that this was the way of it: It would snow for one day, blizzard for three, and then for two be still, steady, bitter cold. On these latter the thermometer would often go

over forty degrees below zero, with the sun shining bright and the sky blue; but with a frightful big yellow-and-orange sun-dog each side of the sun, morning and evening, like two great columns; and sometimes there would be a big orange circle around the sun all day, with much frost in the air.

Some of the nights were light, almost, as day with the northern lights flaming up from behind Frenchman's Butte all over the whole sky, and all colors and shapes. On these nights the horses (they had been wild ponies once) would stamp about in the barn, and Kaiser would growl in his sleep. When I rubbed the cat's back it would crack and sparkle. The wolves seemed to howl more and differently on these nights, and once I went to the station, thinking the fire there needed fixing, and I heard the telegraph instrument clicking fit to tear itself to pieces. Often the next day after the northern lights would come the storm.

It was on the very day that I had said to Kaiser and Pawsy at breakfast (that is, January 25th) that it was a month since I had seen any human being, that I was at the depot after

a load of ground feed, and in looking to the northwest thought I saw something moving. It did not take me long to go up the windmill tower. It was not past ten o'clock in the forenoon, so the light for looking toward the northwest was good, though of course, as the sun was shining, the snow was pretty dazzling. But I could still only make out that something was moving south or southwest. It was impossible to tell if it were men or horses or cattle. So I went down as fast as I could, jumped onto the sled, and the next minute Kaiser had me at the hotel, where I got the field-glass and went back.

Up the tower I scrambled for another look. The snow was so dazzling that the glass did less good than you might suppose, but with it I could soon tell that it was a party of men on horseback following either another party or a drove of cattle or horses. The band ahead swung gradually about and came toward Track's End. The ones behind seemed to be trying to cut them off, but they failed to do it. On they came, and in ten minutes I could see that it was either cattle or horses that were being chased by twenty or twenty-five men on

horseback. The cattle were following a low, broad ridge where the snow was less deep, and which spread out west of the town, making less snow there also, as I have mentioned before. I thought there was something peculiar about the riding of the men; I watched closely, and then I saw they were Indians.

My first thought was that it was daylight and no jack-lantern would scare them away. I saw I must depend on harsher measures. In almost no time I had got over town, locked the barn, shut Kaiser in the hotel, run through my tunnel to the bank so as to be on the west side of town, and stood peeping out a loophole with two fully loaded Winchesters on a table beside me.

CHAPTER XIV

I have an exciting Hunt and get some Game, which I bring Home with a vast deal of Labor, only to lose Part of it in a startling Manner: together with a Dream and an Awakening.

I HAD not had my eyes to the loophole ten seconds when I found out something more about the coming invaders; what I had taken for cattle were buffaloes, a thing which surprised me very much, for they were even then extremely scarce. There were about a dozen of them, and they were coming on all in a bunch and throwing up the snow like a locomotive.

I saw that the buffaloes would follow the swell of ground and that it would bring them in close to town, and perhaps right across the square between the stores and the depot. But I did not believe that they could ever flounder through the drifts to the south and east, so it seemed as if the hunters would overtake them so near that they would prob-

ably stay and again take possession of the town. I think I should rather have seen the outlaws coming. I decided to fire at them and see if I could not drive them off. But it was not necessary. I think some of them must have been the same Indians that called on me Christmas Day, and went away so suddenly, without stopping to say good-by.

I am sure of this, because when still a good half-mile from town they stopped and began circling around, and waving their guns in the air, and making all sorts of strange motions. I suppose they were trying to drive away the evil spirit which they thought was in the place, and which I had had in the pumpkin lantern, and which had also been in Fitzsimmons's barrel. Then one of them who had been sitting still on his horse rode a little forward and got off, and I could see a thin ribbon of blue smoke arising. I suppose he was the medicine-man of the tribe making medicine to frighten the evil spirit; or rather, perhaps, to get up their own courage to face it. This kept up for half an hour. The buffaloes in the mean time had walked slowly along till they were not much more than a hundred

yards away, and stood looking at the houses in the greatest wonder; the first they had ever seen, it is safe to say.

But it appeared that the Indian's medicine did not work any better than white men's medicine sometimes does; for they began very slowly to go back the way they had come. I could see them stop often, and circle around and, I suppose, hold long talks; but they could not get up their courage to venture closer to the place where the awful spirit with the flaming eyes and the fiery teeth had looked down upon them and chased them with his terrible limping gait. At last they passed entirely out of sight.

My next thought was, of course, to try getting a buffalo myself, since I needed fresh meat as badly as the Indians, or worse. But by this time they had drawn back some distance and were out of range for any but a very good marksman, a thing which I was not. I should have to follow them, which I decided to do quick as a flash. Through the tunnel I rushed and out to the barn. In another minute I brought out Dick saddled and bridled. He had not been beyond a small yard for a

month. He began to jump like a whirlwind. How I ever got on with my gun I don't know, but I think I must have seized the horn of the saddle and hung to it like a dog to a root, and some of his jumps must have thrown me up so high that I came down in the saddle. Anyhow, I found myself riding away straight south as if I were on a streak of chain-lightning.

This would not do, so I pulled with all my strength and tried to turn him. I might as well have tried to turn a steamboat by saying "haw!" and "gee!" to it. But the pulling on the big curb-bit made him mad and he stopped and began to buck. I hung on with all hands and legs, and at last he bucked his head around in the right direction, and then I yelled at him, making the most outlandish noise I could, and he started across the square and straight for the buffaloes as if he had been shot out of a gun. You may see the exact course we took, and where the buffaloes were, by looking at my map. This map I have drawn with great care and much hard labor, spoiling several before I got one to suit me. I hope every one who reads this book will look at

the map often, since it shows the lay of the land very well, I think, and just where everything happened.

When Dick saw the buffaloes I think he knew what was up, because he began to act more reasonable. They saw me coming and stopped and looked back surprised. I thought they were going to wait, but they soon galloped on. I saw I must go to one side if I wished to get within range, and turned to the right. In a few minutes I came up abreast of them and within easy range, but I soon found that though I could guide my horse I could not stop him, pull as hard as I might. I could not even make him stop and buck again. He was going straight toward the north pole, and I thought it would not take him long to get there. One way to stop him came to me. It was a rash plan, but I saw no other.

Ahead and a little more to the right was a mighty bank of snow in the lee of a little knoll. It sloped up gradually and did not look dangerous. I turned him full into it. At the third jump he was down to his chin, and I had gone on over his head. When at last I

struck I went down a good ways beyond my chin; in fact my chin went down first, and if any part of me was in sight it must have been my heels. All I knew was that I was hanging to my gun as if it were as necessary as my head.

Why the breath of life was not knocked out of me I don't know, but it wasn't, and I kicked and thrashed about till I got my head and shoulders to the surface, with a peck of snow down the back of my neck. I looked for the buffaloes, and there they stood in blank astonishment, wondering, I guess, if I always got off of a horse that way. I ran my sleeve along the barrel of my rifle, rested it over a lump of frozen snow and fired at the nearest one, which was standing quartering to me. I saw the ball plow up the snow beyond and to the left. They all started on. As mine turned his side square to me I fired again. He went down with a mighty flounder. The others rushed away. I waded nearer and finished him with one more shot.

Dick was still aground in the snow, snorting like a steam-engine, but by the time I had tramped the drift down and got him out he

was over his nonsense and carried me back to the barn quite decently. I was all for skinning and dressing my buffalo. To Taggart's I went and got some good sharp knives, and, taking Kaiser and the sled, started back. I don't think I ever worked so hard in my life as I did at that job. It was not very cold, which was one good thing. Every minute I expected the wolves, and I did not have long to wait either. Before three o'clock they came howling along the trail the buffaloes had made, and I had to stop and fire at them every few minutes to keep them off. I am sure they were not so hungry as usual or I never could have kept them back at all. Twice I killed one when I shot, but I dared not go up and get them, and they were soon devoured by the others. The pack kept growing larger as others came over from the timber north of the Butte.

At last I got off the hide and loaded it on the sled. I wanted to take all of the meat, but it made too big a load, and I had to be satisfied with two quarters. I even had to give up taking the head, which was a fine large specimen. A little after four o'clock as the

sun began to sink low the wolves became bolder, and I knew it was not safe to stay longer. The load was more than Kaiser could pull, so I saw I must take hold and help him. I fired five or six shots at the wolves as fast as I could pump them up, seized the rope and off we went. We were not ten rods away when the whole pack was upon the carcass fighting and tearing at it. They kept up the hideous battle all night and howled so much that it seemed as if their throats must be worn raw.

Once back home I set at my regular work tired enough. But the fires were all low and I expected a day or two more of good weather, and the ease with which the Indians and buffaloes had got down from the north made me fear more than ever the coming of the outlaws from the west. I still had little hope of ever getting out of the place alive, but I could only work on and do all I could for my safety.

I laid the quarters of meat on some boxes in the shed and bolted the door. I was so tired I think I must have slept sounder that night than for a long time. In the morning I found that the shed door had been forced

open, one of the bolts being torn off and the other one broken. Even the hinges were bent. A big piece of the best part of each quarter was gone. I could not tell if it had been torn off or haggled off with a dull knife. It might even have been gnawed off; I could not tell.

I looked for tracks of the robber with, as the saying is, my heart in my mouth; but to no purpose. Although it had neither snowed nor blown during the night, a deep layer of frost, like feathers made out of the thinnest ice, had settled everywhere toward morning and I could find nothing.

That this new reminder of my unknown enemy brought on another attack of terror I need hardly say; but it was daylight and I conquered it better. The worst feeling I had to fight with was that whatever the thing was, it might be looking at me as I moved about town. I thought I saw eyes peering at me, sometimes of one kind, sometimes of another, out of every window, through every crack, over every roof, around every corner, from behind every chimney; even the tops of the freshly made snowbanks, blown over like hoods, were not free from them; and when I

looked out on the prairie I expected to see something coming to catch me. I could scarce tell if I were more afraid on top of the drifts or under them in my tunnels, for here I constantly expected to meet something, or look back and see eyes. I think the loneliness and the strain of the expected robbers must have half turned my mind. If I had known what to look for and dread I think I should not have cared so much, but, not knowing, I imagined everything and became more terrified about I knew not what than were the Indians at my pumpkin lantern. Sometimes I was sorry that I had driven the Indians away; and there were times when I thought I should be glad to have the Pike gang come, just for company.

Three days after the buffalo hunt, in the night, I thought the gang had come indeed; I was not more frightened at any time while I was at Track's End than I was that night. I had gone to bed as usual in the empty building, taking in my drawbridge and closing both windows behind me. The northwest wind had died away at sundown, and the night was still and the sky becoming

cloudy. I looked for an east wind the next day and probably snow later.

What hour I woke up I knew not, but it must have been about midnight. I know I awoke gradually, because I had a long dream before doing so. I thought a giant was shouting at me from a grove of green trees on a hillside; it kept up for a long time, deep, hoarse shouts which fairly shook the earth; I could not see him, but seemed to know what he was. I was not frightened, but stood in a meadow listening. Then there was a crash of a tree falling on the hillside, and the giant's shouts came twice as loud, and I awoke and fought the bed-clothes off my head and knew it was Kaiser barking.

At first this did not startle me, since he often barked in the hotel at night, sometimes at the wolves, and other times, I had reason to think, at the thing which prowled in the night. The next instant I realized that his barks were much louder and that he was nearer. I started up and saw that a dull, flickering light was coming through the cracks in the boards over the window and moving on the wall. I thought of northern lights,

then saw that it was on the north wall and not on the south. I leaped to the window and peeped out a crack and saw that there was a great fire somewhere; the snow was lit up like day almost, and I could see black cinders floating above the barn.

I got into such of my clothes as I had taken off and rushed to the side window. Here the light did not come much, but I could see Kaiser standing with his feet on the hotel window-sill and his head and shoulders out the window. He had smashed through the glass, as he had that day when the wolves came. Not once did he stop his terrific barking.

I pushed up my window and seized the drawbridge. I started to put it across, as I had done so many times before, but I was so excited and in such a foolish fright that it slipped out of my hands and fell between the buildings. I stood a full minute unable to move. The lower part of the hotel window was divided into two panes, and Kaiser had broken one of them. I could see that he had cut himself, and I was afraid of doing likewise. But there was no other way to get out. I put on my mittens and got out

of my window, clinging to the upper sash and standing on the outside sill. Then, with a prodigious step, I landed on the other sill, seized the opening regardless of the jagged glass, crouched down and plunged into the room head first. Kaiser had drawn back as he saw me coming, but as I shot into the room he bounded in front of me, and we rolled over together there on the floor in the darkness. I was half dazed, but knew I smelled smoke, and heard the crackling of a great fire.

CHAPTER XV

The mysterious Fire, and Something further about my wretched State of Terror: with an Account of my great System of Tunnels and famous Fire Stronghold.

ONCE I said, when I told of how I found myself helpless at Bill Mountain's, that I thought Kaiser the best dog that ever lived; here I may say I know it. Though he got in my way and made me turn a few somersets in the dark, he may have saved Track's End from destruction.

When I got to my feet I felt my way across the room and through the hall to a room in the southeast corner of the hotel, where there was a loophole in the boards over the window. Through this I saw that the livery stable was a pillar of fire.

How long I stood there at the loophole staring I know not; I think I did not move or scarcely breathe. It was a large building, the second story packed with hay; and below

there were stored many wagons, some farm machinery, and a quantity of lumber and building material, all things that would burn well. Everything was ablaze, the roof fell in as I looked, and the flames and sparks and smoke reached up like a vast column, it seemed to the very clouds.

At last I saw it was no time for idleness, so I turned away and went down-stairs. As I started to pull open the back door it came to me suddenly that Pike and his men must have come. I reached behind the desk and got Sours's Winchester. Then I went out, leaving Kaiser behind, much to his disappointment. The heat struck my face like a blast from a furnace, and the light dazzled my eyes. I crept very cautiously over the snowbank behind Hawkey's and Taggart's till I came to Fitzsimmons's. Here the heat almost scorched my face, and I saw that the paint on the building was beginning to blister. I peered everywhere for signs of the men, but saw nothing. I crept around the corner of the building and looked across the square, but there was no sign of human life. I expected nothing less than that the

whole town would be burned up; but I was helpless.

Finally I ran across the square and, leaving my rifle on the ground, scrambled up the windmill tower. It was truly a beautiful sight, as I knew despite my fears. The sky was covered with thick, low-hanging clouds, and save for the fire, the night was pitch-dark. The whole town lay below me, half lit up like day, half inky shadows. Even at this distance I could feel the heat, and the sullen roar and crackling of the flames never stopped. But though I shaded my eyes and peered everywhere among the houses and across the prairie, I could make out no living thing.

Cinders were falling all over town, but there seemed to be little fire left in them when they alighted. The roofs were mostly flat and covered with tin, though the depot, the Headquarters barn, and a few others were of shingles. Suddenly a cinder unusually large fell on the depot roof and lay there blazing. I hurried down the tower, and hauled a ladder which I had noticed the day the Indians came from beneath the platform, thinking I might climb up and put out the fire with

snow. There was no water to be had anywhere except from the well back of the hotel. But the flame died out, and I dragged the ladder across the square. It occurred to me that it would be no great loss to me should the depot burn. I could not know the good thing that was later to come out of it.

It was so hot that I could not go behind Fitzsimmons's, so I dragged my ladder across the drifts of the street and through between the hotel and Hawkey's. When I came out in the rear of these I was startled to find a small blaze on the barn roof. I hurried to the barn with my ladder, got it in place, and then with pails of water from the well I managed to put it out. Once more it caught, and once the roof of the shed where Pike shot Allenham blazed up; but I dashed water on the fires and saved both buildings.

At last the stable fire began to die down. The current of air from the northeast had become stronger, and the column of smoke was swaying more and more to the southwest. Just as daylight began to appear in the east the last remaining timber of the stable fell, and, though there was a great cloud of

sparks and still much heat, I saw that unless a strong east wind should spring up there was no longer danger that the town would be consumed. By this time I was cold and stiff, my face scorched by the fire, and my clothes frozen with the water from the pailfuls I had carried. I went into the hotel.

Kaiser was so glad to see me that he reared up and put his forepaws on my shoulders. I was patting and praising him, when suddenly the question, What caused the fire? flashed into my mind. There had been no trace of Pike. From the windmill tower I had been unable to see any trail leading from the way he would come. There was no explanation except that it must have been caused by the same thing that had made me so much other trouble. Till it was broad daylight I paced up and down the office floor, unable to stop. For two days I thought of little else, and brooded on it till I was half sick.

It seems to me as I look back at it that every time I got fairly desperate through lonesomeness or pure fright I went and dug a snow tunnel. I was as bad as a mole

for tunnels; and I meant to tell about my system before this; but so many things keep popping into my mind, what with my memory and with the old hotel register and the letters to my mother lying spread out before me, that I have not once got around to mention any of them except the first, which connected the hotel and the bank, directly across the street. I was so taken up with this that soon after New-Year's I decided to build some others.

I was keeping up at that time five fires (or smokes) besides the one in the hotel, to wit: one in the harness shop and one in Joyce's, both at the north end of the street and opposite each other; one in the bank; one in Townsend's store at the south end of the street on the west side, and one in the depot out across the square in front of the south end of the street. There was a chance for a good tunnel to all of these except to the depot; here the northwest wind had swept across the square and the ground in some places was almost bare.

But the street between the houses was filled up pretty much like a bread tin with a loaf, and starting from the north side of my first

tunnel I began another and ran it straight up the street to between the harness shop and Joyce's, and here I ran side tunnels to each of these. The snow was rather low in front of Joyce's at first, and was not enough above the sidewalk to give me room, but the sidewalk here was high, being made of plank, as were all the walks in town; so I went under it by getting down on my hands and knees, and, as the building had no underpinning, I went on under and up through a trap-door in the floor. I got a good many things to eat from Joyce's, such as canned fruit and the like; but I always wrote down on a piece of paper nailed on the wall everything I got from any store, so that in the spring, if I were still alive, I could pay for it, or, if it were food, Sours could, since I was, of course, still working for him and it was his place to pay for my keep.

South from the first tunnel I next ran another and curved it into Townsend's store. This was a fine, high tunnel; and it would have done your heart good to have seen Kaiser whisk about through all of them, filling the air with snow from waving his tail, just like a great feather duster, and oftentimes

barking at the top of his voice. "Be still, sir," I would say to him; "you will disturb the neighbors," at the which he would bark the louder. I often wondered what a stranger on top of the drifts would have thought to have heard the dog's noise beneath his feet.

It always seemed warm and comfortable in the tunnels, if they were made of snow; this you noticed particularly on a blizzardy day, since, of course, no wind whatever got into them. Indeed, on a windy day I doubt not a snow tunnel would be warmer than a house without a fire. But though Kaiser delighted in the tunnels, Pawsy would have nothing to do with any of them at all except the one which led from the woodshed to the barn.

This I made last. I got into it from a shed window, which I cut down and fitted with a rough door. It went into the barn through a small door in the corner, which was in halves, like a grist-mill door. I opened only the lower half, and this tunnel I used mainly in bad weather. I had only just finished it the day before the fire. It was the day after the fire, when I was feverish for some way to get rid of my scare, that I decided to go to work

on my place of retreat in case the town was burned.

I had thought about building something of the kind for a long while, but could not seem to get it planned out in my mind just to suit me. The burning of the livery stable, of course, set me thinking harder than ever. The place had to be, of course, something that would not burn and some place that could not be found. The only thing that wouldn't burn was the snow, but in case of fire I knew that it would melt for some distance from the buildings. I had just had an example of this. Besides, there had to be a way to get into it which could not be seen either before or after the fire, and this entrance must be from a building so that I would not have to expose myself in going to it. The place must also be where I could stay a few days if I had to. A dozen times I thought I had got the whole thing planned out, and once I wrote about it to my mother, but I always found that something was weak about the plan somewhere. But I now concluded that I had struck on the right thing at last.

A hundred feet back of the next building to

the north of the one in which I had my bedroom was a small barn where the man who owned the place had kept a cow. It was so small that I always thought he must have measured his cow, like a tailor, and built the barn to fit. Fifty feet back (east) of this barn was a haystack. Before the snow came the top of it had been taken off so it was left about four or five feet high and the shape of a bowl turned wrong side up. It was in the lee of the barn, and the snow had piled up over it in a great drift so that you would never once have guessed that there was such a thing as a haystack within half a mile. It was, maybe, a hundred feet from the Headquarters barn to this stack, with four or five or more feet of snow all the way. My idea was to tunnel from the barn to the stack, dig out some hay on the south side and have a snug room half made of hay and half of snow.

There was no underpinning beneath the Headquarters barn (most of the buildings in town simply stood on big stones a few feet apart) and the space where it should have been was filled in with a wide board and banked outside with hay. Under Ned's manger I

sawed out a piece of this board big enough to crawl through, and hung it on leather hinges at the top, concealed by the manger. I then dug through the hay and had a clear field for my tunnel straight to the stack.

I ran my tunnel, or rather burrow, as it was small and low, a little too much east, and missed the haystack by about three feet, but I probed for it with a long, stiff wire and soon found it. I carried in a hay-knife and cut me out a little room like an Esquimau's house, high enough to sit in and wide and long enough so that I could stretch out comfortably in it. The hay had been wet and was frozen, so there was no danger of its caving down on me. As the stack was all covered with snow no wind could get in, and I knew it would always be warm enough to be comfortable with plenty of clothes and blankets. I took in a buffalo-robe and some things of that sort and left them there. I also cached a box of food there, consisting of dried beef, crackers, and such things; enough, I calculated, to last three days. I could hardly tell what to do about water, but at last tried the plan of chopping ice into small pieces and putting them into

some of Mrs. Sours's empty glass fruit-jars. My notion was that in case I was imprisoned there I could button a can inside of my coat and thus thaw enough of the ice to get a drink.

I was very well pleased with what I called my fire stronghold. I could enter from a hidden place in the barn, and could get into the barn through the tunnel from the hotel, which connected with the whole tunnel system. I knew if every house in town burned that it would not melt the snow around the stronghold; and I thought if I were in it when the barn burned I could push down the snow where it melted along the tunnel so that it would not be noticed.

In short I was so tickled over my Esquimau house that I took Kaiser the first night it was done and slept in it; and though it was one of the coldest nights we were comfortable. I heard the wolves sniffing about on the roof, but we were getting used to wolves. I didn't know that we were going to have to sleep under snow again before spring; and in less comfortable quarters.

CHAPTER XVI

Telling of how Pike and his Gang come and of what Kaiser and I do to get ready for them: together with the Way we meet them.

HERE, now, I must tell of how the outlaws came to Track's End, and of the fight we, that is to say, Pike and his gang on the one side and I, Judson Pitcher, on the other side, had that day.

I may speak in prejudice, though I mean to be fair, when I say that I believe them to have been as bad a gang of cutthroats as you could well scare up. Though I fought them all as best I could I make no bones of saying that I should ten thousand times rather have been at home blowing the bellows, or doing anything else.

I was very lucky with these villains and was not caught away from home flat on my back, as I had been by those other scoundrels, the Indians; if I had not been lucky I should

not now be here to tell the tale. Those fellows meant no good to me nor to anybody else. It would have been no bad thing if they could all have been hanged by the neck.

They came, then, to Track's End to rob, and to murder if needs be, on Saturday, February 5th. My good luck consisted in this: The evening before, just as the sun was about to go down, I saw them at Mountain's from the windmill tower with Tom Carr's field-glass. I had gone up on purpose to have a look about, as I did two or three times every day when the weather was so I could see. For three days the weather had been much better than at any time before, and it had even thawed a little; so I was not much surprised when I saw horses coming up to the shack from the west. I made out seven men all told, and some extra led horses. I could see that the men went into the shack and that many of the horses lay down. By this I knew they were tired, and guessed that the gang would probably stay there that night and rest. I was surprised that they had got through on horses at all. I stayed on the tower till it was so dark that I could not see

any more. The longer I stayed the louder my heart thumped.

I knew they might, after all, come that night, either with the horses or on snow-shoes, so I did what I could to get ready for them. The fires were all going well, and I lit several lamps about town. I wished a thousand times for the population I was pretending I had. I thought if I could have even one friend just to talk to perhaps my heart wouldn't act quite so unreasonably. But after a while it tired out and quieted down. My knees got stronger and more like good, sensible knees that you don't have to be ashamed of. I took a look at all the guns and wiped them up. I locked and bolted everything except the doors or windows which led into the tunnels. There wasn't anything more I could do except wait and try to keep that crazy heart of mine a little quiet.

I knew that whenever or however they came they would be most likely to come in on the grade, so I thought the best place to wait was in Townsend's store, as they would have to come up facing the back of it. The windows were planked up; but I knew that there were

no windows in town, or even sides of houses, either, which would stop a bullet from a good rifle. I calculated if they came in the night it would probably be about one or two o'clock, and if they waited till morning I could look for them when it began to get light.

I went over to Townsend's early in the evening and sat down close to a back window in the second story. I had Kaiser with me. I think he was gradually getting the thing through his head, because he had stopped wagging his tail and begun to growl once in a while. I thought I could trust him to hear any sound for three or four hours, and I tried to sleep, but I couldn't. Every few minutes I went up a short ladder and put my head out the scuttle in the roof to look and listen. I heard a good deal, but except for the wolves away off it was all in my ears. About midnight by the stars I went to sleep in my chair before I knew it.

When I woke up I gave a great jump. It seemed as if I had been asleep a week; and it certainly had been several hours. Kaiser was sitting on the floor beside my chair. I knelt down and threw my arms around his neck and

gave him such a prodigious hug that it must have hurt him. "We will do the best we can!" I said to him.

From the roof I could see a faint light in the east. The wind was fresher from the northwest and it was drifting a little; this was good. I scolded myself for having slept so long. I knew if they had come that I should not have been ready for them.

I hurried around and fixed the fires. I drank a cup of coffee at the hotel, but couldn't eat anything. I think if I had had outlaws every day that my keep wouldn't have cost Sours very much. I was back at Townsend's in a jiffy. It was getting red in the east now, and the moon, which had shone all night, was about down. It was light enough so I could see pretty well by this time; but I heard the crunching of the crust by the horses' feet before I could see them at all. Then I saw the whole gang coming on a dog-trot along the grade, two abreast, with one ahead, seven pleasant neighbors coming to call on me at Track's End. I let them come as near as they deserved to come to any honest town and then fired a shot in front of them. I tried to see if

the bullet skipped on the snow, but the smoke got in my eyes.

Anyhow, they stopped pretty quick, and stood all in a bunch, talking. "Maybe you don't like to be shot at," I said out loud. I don't know how it was, but my heart was doing better. I thought I would wait and see before I did any more shooting.

They talked a few minutes; then one of them got off his horse, handed his gun and belt to one of the others, took off his big fur coat, pulled out a white cloth and waved it and came walking very slowly toward the town. This seemed fair enough; I had heard my Uncle Ben tell about flags of truce in the war. I waved my handkerchief out of the port-hole and then waited three or four minutes as if we in the houses were talking it over; then I walked boldly out the back door. Kaiser wanted to go along, so I let him.

The man walked very slowly, and I did the same, but we came up within a few steps of each other at last. This was out not very far from the water-tank. I had expected it was Pike himself, and, sure enough, it was, wearing a leather jacket with the collar turned up.

MY MEETING WITH PIKE, TRACK'S END, FEBRUARY FIFTH

"It's you, is it, Jud?" said he in a kind of sneering tone. (It seemed strange to me to hear a man's voice, I had been so long alone.)

"Yes, it's me," I answered. "What do you want?"

"I sort of thought these here Track's Enders might send out a full-grown man to talk to me about such an important matter," he went on.

"I was man enough to catch you a couple of times and it was only your good luck that you weren't hung up here in Track's End by the neck," I said, a little put out by the way he spoke, because I was almost as big as he was.

"Oh, well, no matter. Now you—"

"I'll tell you the reason I was sent out," I broke in, just thinking of something.

"What is it?"

"I can say all there is to say as well as anybody, but I'm a poor shot, so it was decided that if I didn't get back it wouldn't make much difference in the matter of shooting you fellows down if you come any nearer."

He pulled his collar down and looked at me

over his crooked nose. Kaiser began to growl, but I poked him in the ribs with my foot to let him understand that there was a flag of truce on and he must behave himself. I guess Pike didn't like it, because this sounded as if we couldn't trust him, but he didn't say anything.

"Well," he broke out, "there's no use of us standing here and talking. We've come after that $5,000, and you fellers know it."

"We told you all we had to say about that in the letter."

"Then we'll bust that safe and burn your town," he said, like a savage.

"Go ahead and try it," I answered. "We're ready for you."

His face, which had looked black as night all the while, now turned white with rage.

"We'll try it fast enough and we'll do it fast enough, too," he cried, with some prodigious oaths, bad enough for any pirate. "Look here; I ain't got any gun with me, and I s'pose you ain't, if you're any man at all. But you're as near your gun as I am mine, hey?"

"Yes," I said.

"Then this here flag of truce is ended right

now. When I get hold of my gun I shoot, and you're welcome to do the same!"

He turned and started back on the run. So there was nothing for me but to face about and do the same.

CHAPTER XVII

The Fight, and not much else: except a little Happening at the End which startles me greatly.

IT seems a good deal to believe, but I actually half think that Kaiser had begun to get hold of the fine points of a flag of truce, and that he understood it was ended. What makes me have this idea is that I think he must have taken after Pike at first, though I wasn't doing much looking back just then, being busy at something more important; but anyhow he wasn't with me till I was halfway to the store, when he passed me with a great bark and went on tearing up the snow a few steps ahead. I wish he had got ahead sooner, as I think I ran faster trying to keep up with him; but as it was I don't know but he saved my life.

Either Pike got back before I did, or one of his cutthroats fired for him; I know not, probably the latter, but the shot was for me

and well aimed, so well that I guess the bullet went where I was when it started. Thus it was: Kaiser was ahead, and reared up and threw himself at the store door, which, being unlatched, flew open; it stopped him a little, and I, being close behind, went down over him and into the store head first, as if I had been fired out of a cannon; and at that instant the bullet I spoke of struck the open door half-way up. I slammed the door shut, grabbed my rifle, stuck the muzzle through the port-hole, and pumped three shots out of it without once trying to aim.

Then, without taking breath, I ran out the front by way of the tunnel to the bank, and so up-stairs, where with another rifle I pumped out two more shots, and then looked. The men had left the grade and were coming full tilt out around the water-tank and graders' carts, their horses rearing and floundering through the drifts. I fired twice, aiming carefully each time, but I don't think I hit. I saw they would soon be out of range. Again I dropped my gun, ran down-stairs and through tunnel No. 1 to the hotel and up-stairs to a corner window, double planked up, and giving

me the range on the square and the foot of the street. I was there first, with the hammer of my Winchester back, and with Kaiser behind me wishing, I know, that dogs could shoot.

The next second they came in sight and charged for the street. I aimed and fired; I hit this time; one of the horses went down and the man over his head. The other six came straight for the end of the street. I fired again, but saw no results. I counted on the drift stopping them. It did so less than I expected. Two went down in the snow; four came on. I fired and one man dropped off his horse. The hard crust was holding the other three. I fired again, but it did no good. Then the head one, on a pinto pony, went down like a flash out of sight, horse and man. He had gone into tunnel No. 3, leading to Townsend's store.

I fired three shots as fast as I could work the lever, without stopping to aim. Then I looked out. The other two riders had turned tail. The horse of one had gone down in the snow and he was running away on foot; the other had got off the drifts without going down. I thought it was Pike. It seemed a

good time to shoot at him, and I did so, but without so much as touching him, as I think. The man in the tunnel got out and dodged around the corner of Townsend's store before I could do my duty by him. They were all the next minute at the depot, either in it or behind it.

This thing of their taking the depot was something which I had not thought of. They were now as well covered and protected as I; and it was still seven against one, because the man that I shot off of his horse got over with the others by the help of one whose horse went down in the drift. But their building was more exposed than mine, and they could do nothing about their robbery so long as they stayed there.

They now began to fire their first shots since the one which followed me into Townsend's store. They were well-aimed shots, too, and the bullets came through my window as if the planks were gingerbread. A splinter of wood struck my left eye and closed it up; but I had it shut most of the time anyhow, aiming with the other, so it didn't matter. However, I didn't like the place, and went back into the

room in the northwest corner and got a range on them from one of the front windows. I thought their bullets would glance off of the planks here, and they did; however, the ones which struck the side came right on through, lath partitions and all; but I kept close to the floor. All the time Kaiser stayed close behind me, barking so that I thought he would tear himself to pieces, and with the hair on his back standing straight up.

I had two rifles and a hundred or more cartridges, and I began to give the depot a pretty stiff bombarding. I don't think I missed the building once, and I knew every ball went through the side; but what they did after that I couldn't tell. There were three windows in the depot on the side toward me, all close together near the east end, but none at all to the right of them. None of them were boarded up, and the robbers were pretty careful about showing themselves much at them. They gradually dropped off the platform on the other side and crawled under to the front from where I had watched the Indians that day. They were well protected here, but the wind swept across the west end of the square

and blew such a spray of snow in their faces that they could not see to aim well. On the other hand the sun had now got up and the reflection came in my eyes and hurt my shooting. I wished that the horse was out of the way so I could get through tunnel No. 3 into Townsend's, where a side window, well planked, looked right down on the depot; but it was just as well that I couldn't, as I found out afterward.

They were still thinking that there was a large population in Track's End, and I could see splinters flying all over town where they were plugging away at windows and doors.

I soon noticed that they were not shooting quite so much, and thought some of them might be sneaking around and thinking of coming up from the west, so I went through to the bank once in a while, firing a few shots from its front window at the depot so as to keep up their large-population idea. At the third visit I looked out back and saw a man run from the coal-shed to behind the water-tank. I got ready and waited. Another ran across. I gave him a shot which made him jump. Then I fired half a dozen shots through

the inclosed part below the tank, and if any of the balls missed the big timbers they must have gone through. I thought those fellows would keep awhile, and ran back to the hotel and began to pepper away at the depot again. This I kept up for an hour, I think, when I caught a glimpse of one of the men from the tank going back, and thought likely they had both gone.

The outlaws made just one more rally, and it was very well planned, and if I had not been expecting it it might, after all, have gone hard with the town of Track's End. All at once they began an uncommonly lively firing from under the depot platform. I thought this might mean a charge from the other side, so I started to see. Joyce's store ran back farther than any of the others on that side of the street, and had a side window near the back corner; so I went there instead of to the bank.

It was slow work crawling under the sidewalk and getting up through the trap-door, but I made it at last and ran to the window. Two of the men were charging straight across the square for the rear of Townsend's, carrying a

big torch of sticks and twisted hay. The window was not boarded up, but I stuck my rifle barrel through the glass and fired at them. The bullet, I think, struck the torch, because I saw the fire fly in all directions. They dropped it and retreated in a great panic, while I shot again.

I ran back to the hotel and began shooting once more at the depot. They never fired another shot. I went over to the bank and from the back window I could see them going away to the southwest, keeping under cover of the tank and coal-shed. They came around up on to the grade a half-mile to the west. I had a look at them through the glass. Some were walking and some riding. There seemed to be two men on one horse. I think that more than one of them was wounded, but the drifting snow now made it hard to see. I went back through the hotel and down the street to watch them from the tower above the snow. The pony which had fallen into the tunnel was still there. I noticed it wore an expensive Mexican saddle, all heavy embossed leather, with a high cantle, silver ornaments, big tapaderos on the stirrups, and a horsehair

bridle with silver bit. There was a red blanket rolled up and tied on behind the saddle.

As I went by Townsend's I saw that the window I wanted to get to was as full of holes as a skimmer, and I was glad the horse had blocked up my way. I noticed that the depot wasn't much better off, however, for holes. I went up the tower and watched the outlaws for half an hour. They stopped a few minutes at Mountain's to get their extra horses and then went on.

The wind was coming fresher all the time and I was pretty well chilled when I got down. I was hurrying along across the drifts to the hotel when I noticed the horse in the tunnel again. But his fine saddle and bridle were gone. I knew instantly that it must be the work of my unknown night visitor, who had not stolen anything for some time. This was the first thing that had been disturbed by daylight; it was growing bolder. My heart had behaved itself so well during the fight that I had forgotten that I had such a thing; now it started to thumping so hard that I thought it was all there was to me.

CHAPTER XVIII

After the Fight: also a true Account of the great Blizzard: with how I go to sleep in the Stronghold and am awakened before Morning.

SO that is the true history of the fight, just as it all happened at Track's End, Territory of Dakota, on Saturday, February 5th; and thus, through good luck and being well intrenched behind my fortifications, and having plenty of Winchesters, I beat off the cutthroat outlaws and held the town. If they had waited one day longer for their coming they would have waited a good while longer; for the next day there came such a blizzard as I had never seen before nor since, which roared without ceasing six days, lacking twelve hours; and for two weeks more the weather stayed bad, and seemed to have relapses, as they say of a person sick. No robbers could have come through it, but the ones that had come got back to their headquarters through the first of it, as I have good reason to know.

And for almost six weeks after the fight I lived regularly and without much disturbance, with Kaiser and the other animals for company by day and the howling of the wolves and my own thoughts by night. If the thoughts had given me no more trouble than the wolves I should have been happy, for I think I had got so that I could not sleep unless there was a wolf howling somewhere about in the neighborhood. The loneliness, the dread of the outlaws coming back, the mystery of what or who was in or near the wretched town besides myself, all kept with me and made me wish ten thousand times that I had never heard of the place, or of any place except home.

Though of course I did not keep so miserable all the while. There was plenty of work to be done, and I kept at it most of the time. My eye soon got well. The day after I beat off the outlaws and had a little recovered from the work and strain of that and of the strange start the disappearance of the saddle gave me, I found so many things waiting to be done that I scarce knew what to turn my hand to first. But I had thought the poor pony in the tunnel deserved to be got out before anything

else was done; and this I attended to an hour after the robbers had gone. I went out half expecting to find it gone, too, with its saddle; but it was not.

It was quite tired out and stood hanging its head. To get it out the way it had tumbled in would take a great amount of shoveling in the hard snow, I soon saw, so I decided I would try to lead it through the tunnel and on out by way of the hotel, though it seemed an odd thing to do. So I put a halter on it and tried that plan, and though its back scraped a little in places, what with me ahead and with Kaiser behind barking a good deal, we got it along and into the office and then on through the storeroom and kitchen and out to the barn. Dick and Ned were much excited by the new arrival, and so for that matter was Blossom; and Crazy Jane was like to have cackled her head off. The poor things were the same as I, half dead from lonesomeness.

Then I straightened up things about town which had been put out of order by the fight, fixed the fires again and cleaned up the guns. I didn't forget to go up the windmill tower several times to have a look for the outlaws,

but I saw no more of them. Another thing I did was to lay some big slabs of frozen snow over the hole in the tunnel where the pony fell through, and it was a good thing I did this or I believe the blizzard would have gone near to filling the whole tunnel system. As it was it piled on more snow and covered all trace of the robbers' charge on the street.

I think it would not be possible for me to make you understand what a blizzard that was, which began the next day and kept up for the best part of a whole week. All day and night it roared and pushed at the windows and drove the snow in every crack and hole; here piled it up and there swept it away clean down to the ground. Not once did I go out beyond the tunnels. The fire at the depot I let go out, and the others I kept up more to have something to do than for any use they were, because I knew no outlaws could ever come in such a storm.

While the blizzard lasted I had a hard time to find enough to do to keep my mind off of my troubles. In an old recipe-book, which I found in the closet under the stairs, it told how to tan skins, so I began tanning my

wolf-skins. I whittled out some puzzles, too, and made a leather collar for Pawsy; but she would not wear it. I forgot to say that after the fight I found her in her old place over the door. I taught Kaiser some tricks, too, and gave the cat a chance to improve herself in the same way, but she refused the opportunity.

I did some reading, too, during these days. There was little to read in the Headquarters House, but among Tom Carr's things I found a book by Doctor Kane, telling of his life in the arctic regions, and this I enjoyed a great deal, feeling that I was in a country not much warmer, and that I must be more lonely than he was, since he always had human companions, while I had not one. In Mr. Clerkinwell's rooms over the bank I found some other books, all with very fine leather covers. Some of these I took the liberty of borrowing, but was very careful of them. One was *The Pilgrim's Progress*, and I liked most of it exceedingly, especially the fight in the king's highway which Christian had with Apollyon. Another book was a story, very entertaining, by Charles Dickens, about little Pip and the

convict who came back from Australia; I felt very sorry for Pip when he had to go out on the wet marshes so early, he being so little and the marshes so big.

There was another thing that I tried to amuse myself with, being nothing less than music. I found an old banjo belonging to Tom Carr and an accordion which Andrew had left behind. The banjo I could not do much with, but when I saw the accordion I said to myself that if I could blow the bellows in my father's forge, I ought to be able to work an accordion. So I went at it, hammer and tongs, and soon could produce a great noise, though mighty dismal, I think, and maybe what you would (had you heard it) have called heartrending, since whenever I started up Kaiser would point his nose to the ceiling and howl, very sad indeed. I think when one of our concerts was going on that could a guest have arrived at the Headquarters House he would have thought he had found a home for lunatics and not a hotel for an honest traveler who could pay his way.

During the blizzard also I drew up in black and white a programme for each day which I

decided I must follow out when the weather became better; though I had lived up to most of it from the first. Thus it was:

Five o'clock—Get up, start fire in hotel and make cup of coffee.

Five-thirty—Inspect fires in bank and three stores.

Six o'clock—Feed horses and cow and chickens, and milk cow.

Six-thirty—Get breakfast for self and Kaiser and Pawsy (which included washing the dishes, a hard job).

Seven-thirty—Inspect depot fire and climb windmill tower and look over country with glass.

Eight o'clock—Finish work at barn; and for two hours such miscellaneous work as might be doing, as tunnels or other fortifications.

Ten o'clock—Windmill mounting again; miscellaneous work for two hours.

Noon—Dinner for family and work at barn.

One-thirty—Inspection of fires and windmill mounting; followed by miscellaneous work.

Three o'clock—Windmill mounting; miscellaneous work.

Four-thirty—Final daylight inspection of country from windmill; miscellaneous work.

Six o'clock—Supper and work at barn.

Eight o'clock—General inspection of fires and town, including observation from windmill for lights or fires.

Nine o'clock—Bed.

This system I followed out pretty closely whenever the weather was at all fair. When there was no miscellaneous work I would practise on the skees, shoot at the target, or something of this sort. Quite often on days when the weather would allow (though there were few enough of them) I would go up around and beyond the Butte on a little hunt. I got several jack-rabbits and three more wolves. One of the wolves I left outside the shed, forgetting it. In the morning it was gone. There were not many thefts, however, and the shed was not broken into any more; though, to be sure, I had made the door twice as strong as it was before, and kept everything about town carefully and strongly locked, especially the buildings where the guns and ammunition were.

During the worst storms I used to sleep on

the lounge in the hotel office, but at other times I always retired to the other building and took in the drawbridge. Two or three times, just for a change, I took Kaiser and slept in the fire stronghold. Kaiser and Pawsy still remained as much company for me as they had been from the first. What I should ever have done in that solitude without them I don't know. The great bushy wag of Kaiser's tail, and the loud purr of the cat, were the two things that cheered me more than anything else. I do believe that cat to have had the loudest purr of any cat that ever lived. A young tiger need not have been ashamed of it. And as for the grand wave and flourish of Kaiser's tail, it is beyond all description.

On one of my rabbit-hunting trips, about a week after the big blizzard, I very foolishly got both of my feet frost-bitten and paid the full penalty. The day seemed not quite so cold, and I did not put on the heavy pair of woolen stockings which I commonly wore outside of my shoes and inside of my overshoes. I crouched behind a snowbank beyond the Butte for some time waiting for a

rabbit which I saw to come within range, something which he did not do, and was so interested in this that I did not notice what was happening to my feet. But what had happened was quite plain enough when I got home and a great ache set up in my toes. I got the dish-pan full of snow and thrust my feet in, to draw out the frost gradually; but this did not save me.

Two days later I was fairly laid up. One whole day I could scarce crawl about the hotel office and keep the fire going. I could not get to the barn to feed the animals, though they were suffering for food and water; and what I called my war-fires in the other buildings I knew were out. My feet were much swollen, and the pain and the worry must have brought on a fever, and I lay on the lounge all day expecting nothing less than a fit of sickness; and what will become of me? I asked myself. I had no appetite for food, which alarmed me very greatly. I remember no day of my life at Track's End which seemed darker to me.

Toward night I fell asleep, and awoke with Kaiser licking my face and whining. I re-

membered that I had seen in the pantry a package of boneset, an herb by which my father set great store, holding it a sovereign remedy for all common complaints. I roused up, and by clinging to the back of a chair hobbled after it, and steeped myself a large mugful, very hot, and I believe it did me good. Be this as it may, as the saying is, I was better the next day, and managed to feed the poor, hungry creatures at the barn; and the day after I was able to start the fires. But for a week my feet were very painful, and I suffered much.

It was a little more cheerful as the days began to get longer as February went on, and in the latter part of the month I thought the weather seemed to grow slightly better on the whole. For three days after the big blizzard the thermometer had stood from forty to forty-five below zero each morning, and it did not get up much higher at any time during the day. On the last two days of February it thawed a little in the afternoon, and on March 2d the snow was soft enough so I could make snowballs to throw at Kaiser; but it soon turned cold again.

There were northern lights many nights, flaming all over the heavens, like long swords, and on the night of February 15th there were some more prodigious than I would believe were possible had I not seen them with these eyes. They hung, wavering and trembling, over the whole northern sky almost to the zenith, like the lower edges of vast, mighty curtains, swaying and moving, now here, now there, and with all colors, yellow, violet, scarlet, blood red, as if the whole heavens were going to burn up, the thing being so marvelous that had I not seen lesser displays before I should have thought the world were at an end, no less, and have died, I do believe, of terror. As it was I stood in the snow by the barn gazing till my feet were like blocks of ice and I knew not if I were in Track's End or in the moon. Kaiser at first barked at the sight, then growled, then whined, and next ran yelping away to the shed, where I found him crept beneath a bench. Never in my life before nor since have I seen anything to equal the heavens that night. Early on the morning of February 24th I saw a beautiful mirage. I could see plainly, high in the air, the timber

THE INDIAN GETTING MY RIFLE IN THE STRONGHOLD

and bluffs along the Missouri, and the Chain-of-Lakes and coteaux. It lasted for a full half-hour.

It happened on the night of March 14th that I took it into my head to sleep another night in the stronghold with Kaiser, and so brought about one more startling thing. It seemed that I must always be doing something instead of staying content with things as they were. It had been thawing a little for several days and I was beginning to wonder if I could not hope for such weather that the train might get through before long and release me from the awful place; though I knew the snow was packed in the cuts all along the line to the east like ice, and that it would take a great thaw to make any impression on it.

About nine o'clock I left the hotel, after carefully locking everything, and went through the tunnel to the barn with Kaiser, my rifle, and the lantern. I locked all the doors behind me, and then we crawled through the small door under Ned's manger, and that I fastened also. In the stronghold I rolled up in a blanket and the buffalo-robe with Kaiser beside me. I left the lantern burning in the

tunnel just beyond my feet at the edge of the stack. Kaiser barked at something when we first got in; later I heard wolves sniffing about on the roof; then we both went to sleep.

Some time in the night I awoke; what woke me I suppose I shall never know. But when I awoke I sat up suddenly as if I had never been asleep. I was face to face with the worst-looking creature I had ever seen in my life, black and blear-eyed and ugly, on his hands and knees in the tunnel beyond the lantern drawing my gun toward him by the stock. Then Kaiser sprang up like any wild beast; but I held him back by the collar.

CHAPTER XIX

I find out who my Visitor is: with Something about him, but with more about the Chinook which came out of the Northwest: together with what I do with the Powder, and how I again wake up suddenly.

WHEN I sat up there in the stronghold and saw that creature with the glare of the lantern on his hideous face I knew two things, and these were, first, that it was an Indian, and, second, that he was the thief who had made me so much trouble, though how I knew this latter I can't say. I knew, too, that I was at his mercy.

What I should have done first I don't know if it had not been for Kaiser, but he acted so that it took all my strength to quiet him. I saw it would not do to let him spring at the wretch, who was now squatting in the snow at the mouth of the tunnel with my gun on his knee, the muzzle pointed straight at me.

When at last Kaiser began to act like a

reasonable being, I said to the Indian, pretty loud and sharp, so he wouldn't know I was scared:

"What do you want?"

He grunted and made a noise down in his throat, which I couldn't see meant anything. So I said:

"Don't understand. Where'd you come from?"

He only grunted again. I knew that a great many times an Indian will pretend he can't talk English when he can, so I kept at him.

"What you going to do with the gun?" I next asked him.

This seemed to interest him. He looked down at it over his thick eyelids and said in very good English:

"Shoot thieves. Steal Indians' ponies."

It flashed upon me that perhaps I could make him help me after all, though I could see that he was a renegade and a drunkard.

"Did you see the fight?" I asked, beginning vaguely to suspect the truth.

He gave a grunt which meant yes. "Heap good fight," he added.

"Will you help fight if they come again?"

He said nothing, but sat looking at Kaiser, who was still growling, and only kept back because I held him by the collar.

"Where do you stay?" I asked. He made no answer.

"How did you come here?" I went on.

"Other Indians," he said. "Long sleep—gone when wake up."

I thought I saw through the whole thing.

"Did you see face—all fire—looking at you down in cellar?"

He only gazed at me out of his little black eyes. I guessed that he had drunk more than the others and had gone to sleep before the bad spirit looked in at the window, and so had not seen it and had been left behind.

"Did you see barn burn—big fire?" I asked.

He made not a sound in reply to this.

"Give me the gun," I said.

He gave his head a little shake and jerked out a sharp grunt.

"Give it to me and I give you another to-morrow."

He made not a movement or sound. I

could see that he had no intention of giving it up.

"Do you live in cellar?" I asked. He made the sound that seemed to mean yes. I remembered that I had not gone down into Fitzsimmons's cellar after the Indians went away because things were in such confusion that I saw I could do nothing with them. Since that I had had no occasion to go into the store at all. I had no doubt that he had stolen everything I had missed, but had been unable to get a gun before, because I had kept them very carefully under lock and key. I thought from his looks that he had probably lived principally on the liquor in the cellar, with the groceries that were in the store and what meat he had stolen from me. I could feel that it was getting colder in the stronghold, and guessed that he had broken open the tunnel, either purposely, after hearing Kaiser bark, or by accident when walking over it, as the thaw had weakened the roof a good deal.

"Want to get out," I said. "Go first!"

He pressed back close to the wall of the tunnel. "You go—take dog," he said. I made Kaiser go ahead, took the lantern and

followed, saying "Come" to the Indian. He did so, simply stooping down, though I crawled on my hands and knees. Sure enough, the tunnel was broken down near the barn. We got out through the hole and went across the drifts to the open place back of the hotel. I tried again to get the gun away from him, but he hung on to it tighter than ever. I asked him if he were hungry, and he forgot to grunt and said "yes."

I brought out some food for him, and he stood in the shed and ate it like a hungry wolf. He gave a satisfied grunt when he got through, and I once more tried to get him to let me have the gun, but he hung to it without even a grunt, and started in the direction of the Fitzsimmons building. I went with him, as I could not understand how he had gone in and out for so long without my seeing some traces of it.

He stalked on in silence, his moccasins not making a sound on the hard snow. There was a well with a high curb a few feet behind the Fitzsimmons building and directly opposite the window through which I had shown the jack-lantern. There was now a big bank

of snow as high as the well curb from it to the building. He stepped over in the well curb, and, without looking back, disappeared through a hole in the side of it where he had pried off some of the boards. He had borrowed one of my ideas and made a tunnel between the well and window.

I went back to the hotel, and though I did not like the notion of his having the gun, there was a great load gone from my mind. I saw that every mysterious happening could be explained by the presence of the Indian. I made no doubt he had set the livery stable on fire by using matches when visiting it to find something to steal. A few sounds and part of the glimpse I got of him that night when I watched in the shed would have to be charged to my imagination; but I guess it could stand it. I had to laugh at myself when I remembered how I had thought I heard strange noises before the Indians came at all.

I think I slept better the rest of the night (though it was only a few hours) than I had for a long time, notwithstanding the shock I got when I sat up and saw the Indian, when

my heart, instead of beating too much, just stood still and didn't beat at all.

I saw nothing of the Indian the next morning, and after breakfast went to the Fitzsimmons store. I took the lantern and went down cellar. Everything was still in the greatest disorder. Boxes of groceries had been broken open, and empty cans were scattered everywhere. The missing saddle lay in one corner. I looked about for the Indian, and at first thought he was gone. But at last I found him half in a big box turned on its side, rolled up in blankets, some of which he had stolen from the bed in the hotel. One was a horse-blanket which I was sure came from the livery stable, so I now felt certain that he had been responsible for the fire. He was sound asleep. I poked him with my foot, but he did not move. I instantly knew that he had been drinking more of the whiskey and was sleeping off its effects. I picked up a hatchet, knocked off the spigot, and let the contents of the barrel run on the ground.

I took my lantern and started for the cellar-stairs. I glanced back at the Indian, and

just as I did so he moved one foot a trifle and I saw something under it. I went back and looked closer and saw that it was the stock of my rifle, of which I had not once thought that morning. I instantly decided that I must get it away from him.

I stood my lantern in line with the foot of the stairs, knelt down and very slowly and cautiously began to pull the gun from beneath the Indian. He was lying on it full length, and I knew there was vast danger of waking him. He was much larger than I, and I made no doubt three times as strong. I fairly held my breath as the weapon slowly yielded to my efforts. I got it perhaps a third of the way out when it stuck fast, caught, perhaps, on some of the Indian's clothing. I pulled as hard as I could. It disturbed him, and he moved his feet, and then with one arm threw off the blanket from his shoulders. Like a flash I made up my mind to have that gun regardless of anything.

I jumped forward, and with my knees and hands rolled that savage over as if he had been a log of wood, grabbed the rifle, and

started for the stairs. I snatched at the lantern, but missed it and knocked it over. The flame wavered for an instant and went out. Up the stairs in total darkness I swarmed on all fours, dragging the gun by the muzzle, so that had the hammer caught on anything I am sure the bullet had gone clean through my body. I slammed the door at the top, scrambled out a side window where I had got in, and ran across the drifts to the hotel like a scared coyote, sitting down in the office weak as a cat. I expected no less than that he would follow me, but he did not, and I question if he roused up further from his drunken stupor. Looking back I see what a coward I showed myself; but it seemed quite natural at the time.

It was this day, March 15th, that there began the big thaw. I could not hope spring had come to stay, and that there would be no more winter weather, but it gave me hope that a train might get through. I needed hope of some kind to keep up my spirits, because I felt that with a little good weather I could look for the Pike gang again. If I could have been sure that the train would come first I

should have been gladder to see the thaw than anything else in the world; as it was I wished it might hold off till I could feel that spring had come in earnest.

The 15th was warm, but the snow melted very little. The next morning came the chinook. It was straight from the northwest, where all the blizzards had come from, but it was warmer than any south wind. All day it blew, and the snowbanks disappeared as if they were beside a hot stove. Before night there was a hole in the roof of tunnel No. 3. When I went to bed there were patches of bare ground and pools of water in the square.

The next morning the chinook was still blowing. It had been eating away at the snowbanks all night. I saw the top of the stronghold haystack from my bedroom window. Tunnel No. 1 had caved in. All day the wind kept up. By night the tunnel system was nothing but a lot of gaping cuts in the snow. The drifts had settled so much that the windows and doors were exposed, and it would soon be possible to ride on horseback along the street.

I had never seen a chinook wind before, of

course, but Tom Carr had told me about them. This one was a strong, steady wind sweeping all day and all night straight from the northwest, and seemed to blow right through the drifts. I had rather have seen the snow going in any other way, because I knew this wind only followed the valley of the Missouri River and I was afraid that it did not reach far enough east to thaw out the cuts on the railroad so that the longed-for train could get through. But on the other hand it of course covered all of the country between Track's End and the outlaws' headquarters, and I knew that there was now nothing to hinder their coming; and I was afraid that if they did come I could not keep them off. This day the Indian came out for the first time. I tried to talk with him some more, but could not get much out of him. He cast some very black looks at me, as I supposed for my taking away the gun and, more important, probably, knocking the spigot off of that barrel.

This night I felt sure the outlaws would come again, and I did not go to bed at all. I stayed all night in Townsend's store, thinking to give them as warm a reception as I could.

The next morning, the 18th, the chinook had stopped, but it was still thawing, though not so fast. There was scarcely any wind, but the sun was warm. I tried to take a nap after dinner, but I was too nervous. The prairie was half bare. The little drifts were all gone and the big ones had shrunk to little ones. There was a good deal of snow in the street yet, but it would be easy to ride through it. I walked about all day trying to think of what was best to do. I knew that I could not keep awake another night. At last I decided to try putting the Indian on guard part of the night. He had said (I thought that was what he meant) that the outlaws had stolen ponies from his tribe, and I concluded he could have no love for them, even if he had none for me. I found him in the store, but he was still sullen about the spigot.

"Want you to watch to-night for robbers," I said to him.

He only looked at me, so I repeated it, and added: "I will give you rifle, shoot if they come."

At this he grunted and said, "All right." He waited a moment and seemed to be think-

ing; then suddenly he raised his left hand tightly shut above his head, looked at it with half-closed eyes, and said, "Ugh! scalp 'em!"

It made my blood run cold to see that big savage standing there within arm's-length gloating over an imaginary scalp, knowing as I did that he would probably enjoy scalping me quite as much. But I said nothing except to make him understand that he could go to bed if he wanted to, and I would wake him when it was time. I thought I would stay up as long as I could myself.

Twenty times that day I climbed the windmill tower and looked one way for the outlaws and the other for the train, but got no sight of either. The track was mostly bare as far as I could see, but I knew that even if the chinook had reached so far east many cuts around where Lone Tree had been and west even as far as the last siding, No. 15, would still be half full of snow and ice which would need a vast deal of shoveling and quarrying before any train could come through.

It was growing colder, and after the sun went down it began to freeze. I thought I could easily sit up till midnight, and after it

was dark began patrolling the sidewalk like a policeman. The Indian had gone to sleep in his cellar. There was an east wind which felt as if it might bring snow. I was getting so tired that I could scarce drag my feet and was having another fit of the shivers thinking about the outlaws, when suddenly, as I stood in front of Taggart's, something popped into my head which I had not thought of for almost three months. This was the big can of powder inside the store.

I forgot my shivers and ran to the hotel for the lantern. Then I had another look at the powder-can. It was like any tin can, only big, almost, as a keg. There was an opening in the top with a cover which screwed on. I was wondering if there was not some way that I could put the can under the floor of the bank and blow up the robbers if they tried to open the safe. I felt that the chances for beating them off again in a fight, with no fortifications, were very slim. You may think it strange that I felt so sure the robbers would come again, after having been beaten off once. I was not certain of it, of course, but I knew Pike was not a man to give up easily, and

that he must have fully understood how much the snow helped to defeat them. I knew that since the weather had moderated a spy might have come in the night and discovered that I was alone and how defenseless the town was.

I had heard of fuse, but it happened that I had never seen any in my life. I remember I thought it must be white and soft like the string of a firecracker. So I began to rummage through all the drawers and boxes for fuse. One of the first things I came across was a coil of black, stiff, tarry string, but I threw it to one side and went on looking for fuse. After I had hunted half an hour and found none, I gave up. As I stood there thinking, a good deal discouraged, my eye lighted on the black coil again. My curiosity made me pick it up, and on looking at one end closely I thought I could see powder. I cut off about six inches of it and touched one end to the lantern flame. There was a little fizz of fire and I stood holding it in my hand and wondering what it was doing inside, when suddenly there was a bigger fizz at the other end and a streak of fire shot down inside my sleeve to

my elbow. I concluded that I had found some fuse.

In five minutes I had the powder and fuse in the bank. Then the hopelessness of putting it under the floor dawned upon me. I looked under the building and found a solid square of stones laid up beneath where the safe stood to keep the floor from settling. Everywhere else the water was six inches deep. I went back into the bank. Eight or ten feet in front of the safe was a high counter running straight across the room. Under it was a waste-basket, a wooden box of old newspapers, a spool-cabinet for legal papers, a copying-press, and some other stuff.

I stood the can of powder in the waste-basket. It was a good fit, with room enough around the outside to stuff in some paper to hide it. Then I put the basket in the box of newspapers. I cut the fuse in two in the middle, unscrewed the cover and put the ends of the two pieces down in the powder, balancing the copying-press on top to hold them in place. I covered the whole thing up with newspapers. Then I brought an auger from Taggart's and bored a hole a little above the

floor through the side of the building, and right on through the side of the building to the south, which stood so close that it almost touched the bank. There was nothing to either except a one-inch board and a thickness of lath and plastering. I passed the two lines of fuse through the two holes, and into the other building, which was a drug store. In the other building I tied a loose knot in the ends of the fuse and left it lying on the floor behind the counter and covered with a door-mat.

Ten minutes later I had my Indian ally posted on the platform of the depot with his gun.

"If pony thieves come, shoot at them," I said to him. "I'll get up and shoot at them too."

"All right, me shoot," he said; "take plenty scalp."

I went back to the drug store feeling better. There were now two chances for defeating the outlaws if they came; to beat them off, or blow them up with the powder. I lay down on the floor back of the counter with my head on the door-mat. The windows were boarded

up, and I felt sure that even if they came they would never find me here.

I woke up three hours later, as I had that first night six months before in the Headquarters House, with Pike hold of my ear, and a man pushing a smoky lantern in my face.

CHAPTER XX

What the Outlaws do on their second Visit: with the awful Hours I pass through, and how I find myself at the End.

THE first thing I heard was a loud laugh, and then:

"How are you, Jud?" said Pike. "Back again, you see. Hope yer feeling all right."

I saw I might as well make the best of it, though you may be sure I was half scared to death.

"Yes, I'm feeling pretty well," I said. "I was able to be about the last time you were here, maybe you remember."

Pike scowled at me. "Yes, that's so, you was," he said. "You stood us off in pretty good shape that time—you and the snow. We were fools not to find out that you were all alone. But we app'inted an investigating committee *this* time, and we're onto your game. Just excuse me, but I'll have to ask

you to wear a little of Taggart's jewelry while we tend to some important business."

He pulled out a pair of handcuffs and slipped one of them around my wrist and shut it up so tight that it pressed into the flesh. Then he led me in front of the counter, slipped the other cuff through a brace under the front edge of the counter, and then clasped it around my other wrist, leaving the short chain which connected the cuffs behind the brace, so that I was a prisoner. He pushed up a chair and said:

"Set down and make yourself comfortable, Jud. I'll see if I can't find a handful of buttons for you, and you can put 'em on the counter and play checkers with your nose."

The men laughed at this, and Pike went on:

"We met your pardner out here, the dark-complected feller. He was a-riding off our pinto that we left here by mistake last winter, with our saddle and things, and a-leading your two broncs, so we just stopped him and gathered 'em in, and I reckon they're *all* our'n now, *most* of 'em, *anyhow*. And in consideration of our only shooting him around the edges careful like, he give us some valuable informa-

PIKE HANDCUFFING ME IN THE DRUG STORE, MARCH NINETEENTH

tion, such as just where you was a-sleeping, Jud, and where we'd find the blacksmith tools, and so forth. That's the way to get along with an Injun and have everything all easy-going—shoot 'im, *very careful*, around the edges."

Again they all laughed, and then went out the back door, which, I noticed, had a small hole cut in it over the bolt big enough to let in a man's hand. There were five of them, counting Pike. The windows were boarded up and it was dark in the store, but as the door opened I saw that it was quite light outside and that it was snowing.

As I sat there in the dark unable to move and with the handcuffs cutting into my wrists you may believe I was miserable enough. I expected nothing short of being killed by the gang before they left. I saw what a fool I had been to trust the scoundrelly Indian even as much as I had. It was a little satisfaction, however, to know that he had failed to get off with his stolen property even if it had fallen into the hands of a worse set of thieves. I soon heard them at work on the safe in the bank. Of course I thought of my fuse, but it

was a dozen feet away, the other side of the counter, and I could see not a shadow of hope of getting at it.

I think I sat there as much as two hours, listening to the noise in the next building, when Pike came in and said:

"You'll be glad to hear, Jud, that we're getting along beautiful on that safe. We're a-going to blow the stuffing out of it the next thing *you* know. Reckon if you ain't particular we'll just borrow a sleigh we see out here and a set of Sours's harness for a couple of our horses when we go away, 'cause we think the specie may be a little heavy. Besides, we're calculating there may be some other stuff around town worth taking off—Winchesters and such agricultural and stock-raising implements," and he laughed. He seemed to be in very good humor.

He went back, and for another long while I heard nothing but steady drilling on the safe and a little of their talk, though I could not catch much of that. Sometimes, too, I could hear Kaiser barking. He was locked in the hotel, and I thought he knew I was in trouble and wanted to get out and help me.

After what seemed hours Pike came in again.

"We blow 'er open now very shortly," he said. "A reg'ler little Fourth o' July celebration of our own, hey, Jud?" Then he laughed and went on: "We need that money and you bet it's going to come handy." He looked at me, came closer with the lantern, and said:

"Jud, what d'ye say to coming in with us and having your share like a man? You're a good one, if you *are* young, and we can find plenty of work for you, and always you get your share."

"No," I said, "I don't care to."

He looked at me sharply a moment and then went on:

"Just as you please, of course. But me and the boys was talking it over and we calculated it was the best way to dispose of you, a *pile* the best for you and *some* better for us."

I had kept looking straight into his eyes, under his big eyebrows. "No," I said, "I won't do it."

"Oh, take your choice," he answered, "take

your choice. Just as you think best, of course. Only you know the old saying about how dead men don't tell any tales. And if you come in with us you get your share, just the same as if you'd done your part of the work."

I said nothing. He waited a minute, then went out and shut the door. I sprang up and pulled and wrenched at the brace with all my strength. The handcuffs cut into my wrists, but I did not feel it. The brace stayed as firm as ever. I sat down weak and trembling with my last hope gone. A minute later there was a loud explosion in the bank, which shook the building I was in. Next came a cheer from the men. Then voices, and I heard Pike shout:

"It's all afire here—bring a pail of water, Joe!"

The well windlass creaked and I heard a man start in from the back. Next I heard Pike say, "We'll soon fix that fire," then came an explosion and a crash, like an earthquake, and the wall came down upon me, and the counter came over and I was half under it. I heard the cries of the men, and, wriggling

about, I got out from under the counter and found my hands free from the brace, and the snowflakes coming in my face through where half the side of the building had been blown away.

CHAPTER XXI

After the Explosion: some cheerful Talk with the Thieves, and a strange but welcome Message out of the Storm.

AS I struggled to my feet out of the wreck I was so dazed that I had to lean against the wall to keep from falling. I felt something running down my face and at first wondered what it was; then I saw it was blood. One of my arms felt numb and I was afraid it was broken; and my hands were all torn and bruised. I could not see into the other building for the smoke and falling snow, but I could hear the groans and curses of the men. I thought that if any of them were able they might come to take revenge on me, and that I best go away, especially as I was helpless with the handcuffs still on my wrists. I managed to pull open the front door and ran to Taggart's, thinking that I might get the handcuffs off in some way.

I found the box from which Pike had got them. There were two other pairs, with keys. I took the keys in my teeth and tried, but neither would fit mine. Then I went to the tin shop up-stairs. There was a file on the bench and I managed to get this into the vise and began rubbing the chain up and down on the edge of it. It was the hardest work I ever did, but I soon saw that I could get my hands free in time if I kept on. Once or twice I heard Pike shouting something and I could still hear Kaiser barking in the hotel.

I don't know how long it took, but at last I got my hands separated, though of course the clasps were still tightly around my wrists. I looked out of the window and saw that the sleigh was in front of the bank with a pair of the outlaws' horses hitched to it. I was afraid that the safe had been blown open with the first explosion and that they were getting the money after all. I ran out the back door and along behind the buildings to the hotel. Kaiser bounded around me, and Pawsy was again in her old place over the door.

I peeped through the cracks in the boards over one of the front windows. The whole

front of the bank was blown away, but I could just make out through the snow that the inner door of the safe was still closed. Two of the men were lying in the bottom of the sleigh, motionless, whether dead or alive I knew not. Pike was on the floor of the bank, propped up on one elbow, giving orders to the one they called Joe, who was helping the fifth man into the sleigh, who seemed badly wounded and sat in the bottom of the box.

Then Joe went back to help Pike. He took him by the arms and was dragging him toward the sleigh, when I suddenly made up my mind that I would keep Pike. I went to the closet and got Sours's double-barreled shot-gun. I knew there was no weapon that they would fear so much at close range. I opened the door and walked out into the street with it.

"Just leave Pike right here," I said. "I'll take care of him. The rest of you go on."

I guess they thought I was buried under the rubbish in the drug store, because I have seldom seen men more astonished. I walked up closer. Even Joe looked half wrecked, and his face was all blackened with powder.

"Hello, Jud," called Pike. "You ain't a-going to strike a man when he's down, be you, Jud? I might 'a' been harder on you many a time than I was, Jud."

"No, I won't hurt you, but you've got to stay, that's all," I said. "Help him over to the hotel and then go on with the others and don't come back," I added, looking at Joe.

There was nothing for him but to do as he was told, because I held the gun on them both, and they had heard the click as I drew back the hammers. Pike's left leg seemed to be broken and he was all burned and blackened with the powder. I sent Joe for a mattress, which he put on the floor of the office and rolled Pike on it. Then he drove off with the others.

So that is the whole account of the second visit of the outlaws to Track's End, just as it all happened, Saturday, March 19th.

"Now, Pike," I said, after Joe had gone, "the first thing—out with that handcuff key!"

He took it from his pocket and gave it to me. I unlocked each of my bracelets. They left deep red marks around my wrists. Pike asked for a drink of water and I got it for him. I could see that he was in pain.

"You've played it on us again, Jud, I'll be hanged if you ain't," he said to me. "What 'd you have under that counter, Jud?"

"A can of blasting-powder," I answered.

"Dangerous place to store it when there's explosions, and kerosene lamps and hot stoves, and fires, and such truck around. It done *us* fellers up, and that's a fact."

"Well, I wasn't trying to make you feel at home," I replied. "How did you happen to be blowing open other folks's safes?"

"Oh, it's all right, Jud, it's all right," he said. "I ain't finding no fault. Only I think you'd 'a' done better to join us and get your share."

Though I still felt pretty dizzy and weak I started out to look about town. I found that the inside door of the bank safe was still tight shut, though the outer one was blown off. The building was wrecked and the drug store was not in much better shape. I could see that the bank had been afire, but that Joe had put it out with water from the well.

Outside the barn I found Dick and Ned and the pony the Indian had taken, with three of the gang's horses which had been left behind, huddled together trying to keep out of the

snow, which was still coming down at a great rate and was being swirled about by the wind. I let them in, and they were all very glad to get some feed, as were likewise the cow and chickens. I found that the Indian had pried open the back door with a crowbar from among the blacksmith's tools.

Night was already coming on and I was so tired and sleepy that I could scarce keep up. So I made Pike as comfortable as I could, and went to bed and slept like a log.

The first thing I knew in the morning was that the storm had turned into a raging blizzard. It was not yet very cold, but the snow was drifting as fast as it had any time during the winter. I found Pike more comfortable. I had hoped for the train, but the storm discouraged me. I began to wonder what I was going to do with him. That his leg was broken was certain, and I almost wished that I had let him go with the others.

It was Sunday, and the first thing I did after breakfast was to write my regular letter to my mother, telling her all that had happened the past week; and it was a good deal. Then I started out to take another look around

town. My sleep had done me a world of good, though I still felt stiff and lame.

It was impossible to do much in the storm, but I covered up the bank safe with some blankets, and nailed boards over some windows in other buildings which had been broken by the explosion. I finally turned up at the depot and went in to see about the fire.

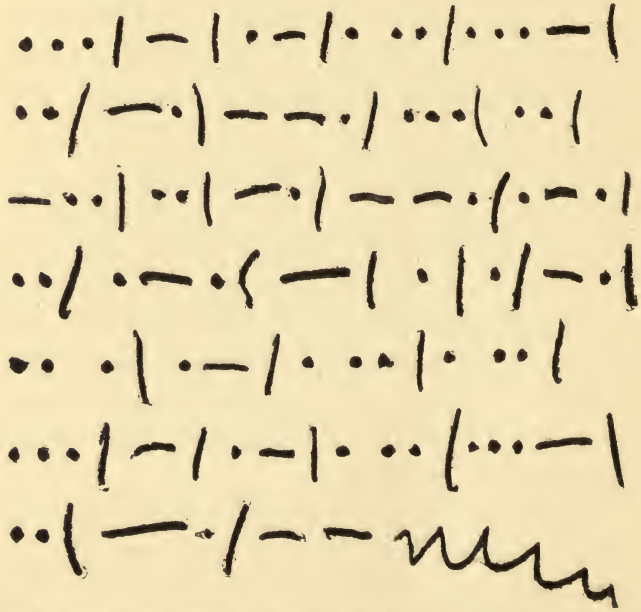
As I opened the door I was astonished to hear the telegraph instrument clicking. I knew the line was down and could not make out what it meant. I understood no more about telegraphing than Kaiser, but in visiting Tom Carr during the fall I had learned to know the call for Track's End, which always sounded to me like clicket-ty-click-click, clicket-ty, over and over again till Tom opened the switch and answered. Well, as I stood listening I heard this call for Track's End, clicket-ty-click-click, clicket-ty. Then I saw that the line must have been repaired; but if this were so a train must have come nearly through; otherwise the repairmen could not have reached the break, which, I remembered, Tom said was just beyond Siding No. 15, fourteen miles east of Track's End.

I went to the table and sat down and listened to the steady clicking, the same thing, nothing but the call. It gave me a good feeling even if I didn't know where it came from. I could not understand why any other office should be calling Track's End, as they must all know the station was closed for the winter. Then it came to me that a train must be on the way, and somebody thought it had got here.

Just to see if I could, I reached over, opened the switch and tried giving the Track's End call myself. Of course I did it very slowly, with a long pause between each click; but I thought I would show the fellow at the other end that Track's End wasn't quite dead after all. Then I closed the switch, and instantly was surprised to hear the call repeated, but just as slowly and in the same way that I had given it. It came this way two or three times, then I gave it as best I could, then it came the same way once more.

After this there was a long pause, and then it began to click something else, very slowly, dot, dash, dash, dot, and so forth, with a long stop between each. I picked up a pencil and marked it down, slowly, just as it came.

Every two or three clicks there was a very long pause, and I would put down a monstrous big mark, thinking it might be the end of a letter; and when it stopped this is what I had, just as I wrote it down (I have the paper to this day), though it might as well have been Greek for all I knew of its meaning:



After a minute or two it began again, but I soon saw that I was getting the same thing.

I leaned back in the chair and wished that I could read it. Then I sat up with sudden new interest, wondering if I could not find a copy of the Morse code somewhere and translate the message. It didn't seem likely that Tom would have one, as he was an old operator; but I began rummaging among his books and papers just the same. I had not gone far when I turned up an envelope directed to him on which was some printing saying that it contained a pamphlet about books for telegraphers. I opened it, and on the first page, as a sort of trade-mark, was what I wanted. In ten minutes I had my message translated. It read: "Starving. Siding fifteen. Carr."

CHAPTER XXII

The last Chapter, but a good Deal in it: a free Lodging for the Night, with a little Speech by Mr. Clerkinwell: then, how Kaiser and I take a long Journey, and how we never go that Way again.

WHEN I knew what the message said I saw that a train must have got to No. 15, and I jumped up and started for the door; then I ran back again and slowly spelled out O. K. on the instrument, and without waiting to see what came in reply hurried over to the hotel as fast as I could go.

It was now eleven o'clock, and though the storm was as furious as ever I was determined to set out and try to reach the siding. If it had been before the thaw, with all of the winter snow on the ground, I never should have thought of doing it, but most of the old drifts were either gone or frozen so hard that they could be walked over without the least fear of breaking down; and as for the new drifts

they were soft and not yet deep. I first thought of taking the horses and large sleigh and of keeping on the railroad track, but I remembered that there were a good many culverts and little bridges which I could not cross that way, and I knew to leave the track would mean to be lost instantly. So I saw that the best I could do was to take Kaiser and the small sled.

I soon had this loaded with all the provisions that I thought we could get through with, though the selection was poor enough. But I got a lot of coffee from the store, with bacon and canned Boston baked beans and other such things. There was a little of the buffalo meat left, and as I had kept it buried in the snow during the thaw it was still as good as ever. This, with what eggs and other things in the hotel which I had, I put on, covered it all snugly with a blanket, tied the load firmly and was ready. I told Pike where I was going, though the next moment I saw from the look on his face that I should not have done so. Still, I could not see what harm he could do with his bruises and broken leg. I left food and water where he could

reach them, and started out, walking beside Kaiser and helping him drag the load.

It was just noon when I got off. We went to the station and started down the track. It was impossible to see more than a few rods, but the wind, which all along had been in the northeast, had now shifted to the northwest, so it was partly in my back. It was both snowing and blowing, and we waded through the damp, heavy, new snow, and slipped and stumbled over the old drifts. I soon saw that there was a big job before us; and I had not expected any pleasure excursion.

The first accident was when I fell through between the ties over a culvert up to my chin. It was too high to get back that way, so I went on down and floundered out at the end and so fought my way back up. We soon got used to these, and generally I told where they were by the lay of the land, and either we went round them or walked carefully over on the ties. But before I had gone three miles I saw that my only hope of reaching the siding that night was in the wind going down; but it was all the time coming up.

But we plodded on, in some places making

pretty good time; but on the other hand we often had to stop to rest. Kaiser seemed not the least discouraged, and when we stopped even tried to wag his tail, but it was too bushy a tail to wag well in such a wind. After a while the blizzard became so blinding and the track so deep with snow that we had to leave it and follow the telegraph poles on the edge of the right of way, stopping and clinging to one pole till a little swirl in the snow gave me a glimpse of the next one; then we would plunge ahead for it, and by not once stopping or thinking I would usually bump up against it all right; though when I had gone fifty steps if I did not find it I would stop and stand still till a little lull made it so I could see the pole, and then sometimes I would find that I had passed it a few feet to one side.

At last (but too soon) I thought I noticed that the light was beginning to fail; and it was certainly all the time growing colder. A little farther on we came to a deep cut through a coteau. The cut was so filled with new snow that we could not wade through, and the side of the hill was covered with the old snow and so slippery that we could not scramble

over. The only thing to do was to go around it. This I thought we could do and not get lost by keeping close to its foot all the way around.

We started and plowed on till I thought it time to see the telegraph poles again. We went on, but I saw the hill was not leading us right, and turned a little the other way. Another coteau was in our path and I turned to avoid it. For another five minutes we went on. I turned where I was sure the railroad must be, when suddenly it seemed as if the wind had changed and was coming out of the south. I knew it undoubtedly had not, but by this sign I understood that I was lost. I felt dazed and bewildered and was not sure if I were north or south of the track. But for another fifteen minutes we struggled on. I had lost all sense of direction. I stopped and tried to think. Every minute it was growing colder; how long I stood there I don't know, but I remember that I heard Kaiser whine, and started at it, and realized that I was growing sleepy. I knew what the sleepiness which comes on at such times means, and I turned around square to the wind and started on.

A dozen steps away we came face to face with a big new snow-drift, its top blown over like a great white hood. I guessed that there was an old bank under this one. I took a stake from the sled, dropped on my hands and knees and began to poke about for it. I soon found it, broke through the frozen crust with the stake and began pawing out a burrow with my hands. I dug like a scared badger and in a few minutes had a place big enough. I wriggled out, pushed Kaiser in, took the blanket from the sled, backed into my snow cave again and rolled up as best I could in the blanket. In five minutes the mouth of the burrow was drifted over and we were in total darkness.

I was not afraid to sleep now, as I knew, what with the snow, my big coat, and the blanket, not to mention Kaiser, I would be safe enough from freezing; so that is what I did till morning, scarce waking once. When I did wake, though I knew no more than anything if it were morning, I could no longer hear the wind roaring, so I burrowed out; which was no small job, either, since I had to dig through a wall of snow, packed solid as a cheese.

But when Kaiser and I burst out, like whales, I guess, coming up to breathe, we found it clear and calm, with the sun just peeping up above a coteau and the frost dancing in the air. And we were not five rods from the railroad, though in that blizzard we could no more see it than we could Jericho. It took half an hour to dig out the sled and get started, with Kaiser barking, and his breath like a puff of a locomotive at every bark, it was so cold. I put on the skees now (which I had had tied on the sled) and off we went over the drifts, now packed hard, at a good rate.

It was no more than ten o'clock when I saw a white cloud of smoke far ahead and knew we were coming to the siding; and Kaiser saw it too, I think, and we both started to run and couldn't help it. And half a mile farther we saw a man coming slowly; and who was it but dear old Tom Carr!

I think I never was so glad to see anybody in my life. The poor fellow was so weak that he could hardly stand, but he was making a start for Track's End.

"Jud," he said, "we started out Wednesday, with a dozen passengers, as many shovel-

ers, and three days' food. We got to No. 15 Saturday. Then the storm came and the food was about all gone. Yesterday the storm kept up and the men could have done nothing even if they had had food. This morning they are at it, but they are so weak that they can't do much, but with what you've got on your sled we'll get through."

He went back with me, and there were Burrdock and Sours and Allenham and some others, all shoveling at the cut with the men; and in the car was Mr. Clerkinwell, now recovered from his sickness, but weak from the lack of food. I won't try to tell how glad they were to see me; but I was gladder to see them. I felt that I was out of the prison of Track's End at last; and so many times I had thought I never should get out alive!

"And why didn't you die a thousand times from loneliness," cried Mr. Clerkinwell, after he had talked a few minutes, "if from no other cause?"

"Oh," I answered, "I had some company, you know; then there were callers, too, once in a while." Then I said to him that "I wrote every Sunday to my mother," at the

which he patted me on the head, just as if I weren't taller than he!

The men all came in and we got up a sort of a meal; at least there was plenty of coffee, bacon, and beans. Then they went at the shoveling again, the engineer got up steam, and soon we left the short platform and little cube of a house at the siding behind. There was a snow-plow on the engine, and the men now worked with so much energy that we bucked along through the cuts, and before sundown were at Track's End. So, on Monday, March 21st, the train which had gone away on Friday, December 17th, was back again, with a long whistle and a cheer from every man, and barks from Kaiser which lasted longer than all.

I had told part of my story, and we all went over to the Headquarters House, Allenham to arrest Pike. He was gone. The barn had been broken open that morning and one of his ponies taken out. How he ever did it with his broken leg was more than any of us could tell, but he had done it, and it seemed no use to try to follow him. I saw my mistake in telling him so much; but it was too late to remedy it.

MR. CLERKINWELL GIVING ME HIS WATCH AND CHAIN

The next day another train came, bringing a whole crowd of Track's-Enders; and that night they held a little meeting at the hotel and were for giving me a reward for what I had done (which was no more than I had been left to do); but I told them, No, that Mr. Sours had paid me my wages according to agreement and that I couldn't take any reward; but when Mr. Clerkinwell got up and took off his watch and chain (gold they were, you may be sure) and said I must take that whether or no, so that when I "looked for the time o' day I would always remember that a townful of people, and especially a certain old gentleman, thanked me and did not forget what I had done"—when Mr. Clerkinwell did this, I say, and I guess there were tears in his eyes, what could I do but take it? and take it I did, and wear it to this day.

Mr. Clerkinwell told me afterward that there was a full $20,000 in the safe.

So that is all there is to tell of my strange winter at Track's End, so many years ago. Three days later the regular trains began to run, and the first one took all of my letters to my mother; and no more than two days after

she got them I was there myself, bringing only one important thing more than I had taken away (besides experience), and that was Kaiser. I had asked for him and got him; first I had thought to take away Pawsy, too, but concluded to leave her with Mrs. Sours, where she could get on the door in case of trouble. And since, though I have done my share of wandering about the world (and perhaps a little more than my share), I have never again visited Track's End; nor do I think I want to go back where the wolves howled so many dismal nights, and where the other things were worse than the wolves.

THE END

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